Title Page
24 June 2019 10:00am

WestPac Jack

By

Mary Seacross

To The One and Only:
With all my devotion

To the US Navy:
Who'd spoon-fed us on
Seastories, tradition
And legends of the deep;
Who fills our sailors with Glory -
Of the ever *'Encompassing Sea'**

**'Encompasing Sea'from*
"The Sea Around Us"
by Rachel Carson

And, of course, to Jack and my shipmates

Former Title: What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor?

Edit Log

23 June 2019 Removed edit log to one page down to allow the internet archive to see the title page more clearly. Please update date above

15 June 2018 opened file. 12/12/2016 My Tablet copy is the Master Copy, edited from there and then sent up to the net via bluetooth to my phone or directly. Another copy on my Gmail account tallshipsailormary@Gmail.com

Working copy is this one, located on tablet only, the sd card is just for back up files and not for transport. I will copy by via a flash drive to Staples or by Bluetooth

12/12/2016 copy attempt to move to tablet. Well now I was about to throw the whole thing away!! Its working just fine,yeas

10/29/2016 7:39 PM

10/29/2016 5:23 PM laptop system date reset by Nelson

9 May 16 Opened, Norwalk

Jan 7 2016 Long Beach

22 Nov 2015, 13 Nov 15. 9/11/15b edit 3/17/2015 5:56 PM/ 12/27/2014 9:47 AM


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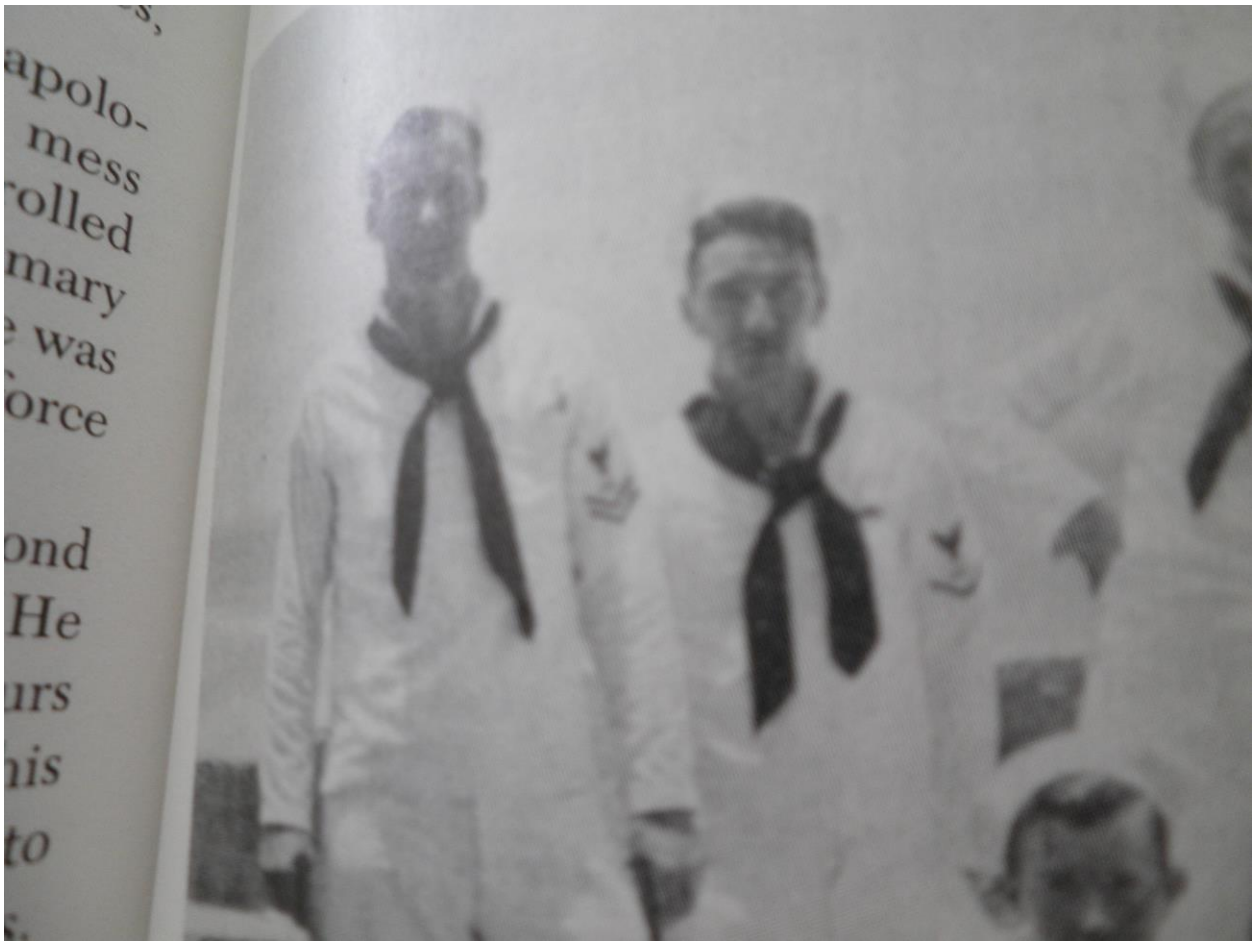
Back Cover:

Sailor, Lover, Legend,
Fallen...

He was enchained by something, something that she could not or would not understand. There was something in the fact that he had played pool and partied the whole night long in the Enlisted Club right before the advancement exam. And yet he had cared for us and his orphanage in Olongapo. *He cared for us kids, you see, because his care was his cross, his penance, and of his guilt as sharp as a beer bottle broken…*

"There used to be hundreds of sailors just everywhere." An old taxi driver said, of the waterfront.

He had looks, oh for the books! A long tall stride, a grin that took them all in, for his shipmates mostly loved him but some hated him, and the port girls yearned for him to come back, though some knew he could never be caught, for, the immense freedom of the sea had stolen his heart. All he wanted to do was stay in, when he had the WestPac fever: booze and broads and, don't hate him, folks, and, girls don't you love him either, though you must, for he's lost and beloved, a saint and a rascal he doesn't mean to steal our hearts, but it's easy to do when you have the whiles WestPac Fever, my friends.



The Mystique of the World Sailor

Followed by supporting iconic image of a long-legged sailor
In crackerjack, holding a kid

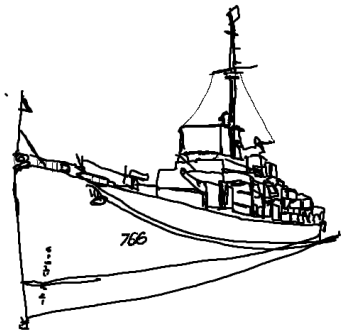
[Other ideas for other places: Poseidon]

SEA CHANTEE. JOLLY SAILOR BOLD

Part I
WestPac Jack

You're in the Navy now,
You don't know why or how;
You'll never get rich,
You son-of-a _____ !
You're in the Navy now!

Boot Camp Marching Cadence



'Back in the Day' as they say, a young man went to sea in the'The Nav' – to escape things like the draft, or jail, or college books, or perhaps the doldrums of civilian life; and, for fourty years after the great World Wars this huge fleet dominated all the seas and these sailors sailed and partied by all the world's shores - by outposts like Sasebo or Olangapo – the watering places for the Pacific Fleet and young men's fancies.

For their forefathers had fought fine in the World Wars and the seas they had bought with blood had become theirs - a passdown of ways of the sea which was this: the world was fine and free and a sailor belonged to none and to all in the Wilds of the Western Pacific.

Inside the gates the world of base reigned, a world unto itself, it was a walled off world, with its own rules, its own laws, its own clothes, its own ways; and just off base existed the freedom of young men without our society nor the cosy clutches of family; really, the Wild West was reborn into the WestPac, and you'd never seen such the like as that!

And then one day it wasn't.

For, along came a man like Gorbachav, with ideas like Glasnost and Perestroika, defeating our foes, the Reds, and `123leaving our professional heroes beached on the high tide of Peace, and men like our Jack, who had never known a life without The Navy, or the Sea.

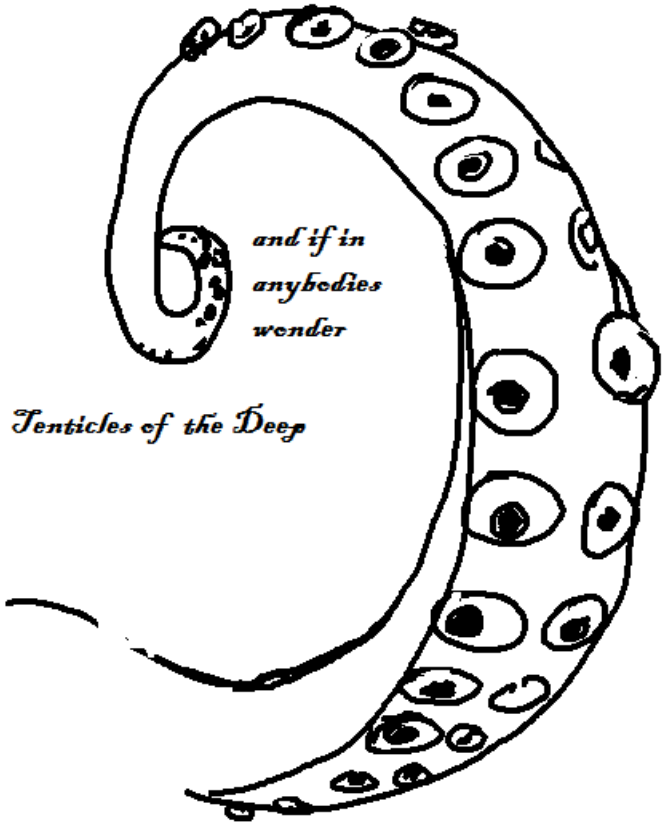
What a life he'd had in it! '*It's not a job – it's an adventure*!' was the recruiter's slogan back then and he'd had it all – the lusty life of a sailor adventure in the high seas -- along with five WestPac Cruises, three overseas duty assignments - and three Article 15s and Captain's Masts; but that was our Jack and this was the tradition of men and boys to sea, back then, or maybe you forgot or never knew of this wayward life to sea.

And so, if you had served in 'The Nav,' circa 1980, before the great *RIFting* of the Fleet and *Tail Hook Scandal*, if your saw a sailor, WestPac-lean swaying with breakers still underfoot, why, you were seeing a real salt, who, at 21, had seen all the seas in the Pacific Rim – where illusive mermaids in the mind still swam, or were tattooed on the arms of a big Boatswain's Mate, Second Class; or danced for drunken sailors in Olangapo saloons, or storied by sleepy SONAR Techs a'watching the scopes for deep-doven subs – all in yarns as in oldentimes told by all sailors to sea - in the new steel-hulled Navy, painted *hazegray.*

And, now decades later I see that Navy I knew has gone, gone far away…

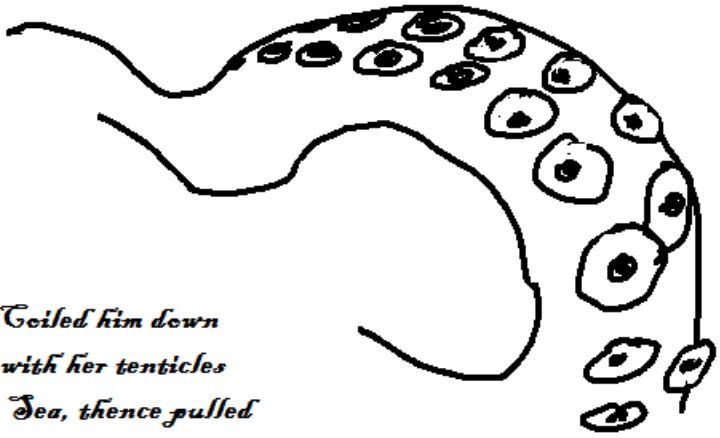
{can put any kind of quote on Naval Power here to break up versage and add to validity of this story]

The Sea, She,
Sweetly Savage



and if in
anybodies
wonder

Tenticles of the Deep



Had Coiled him down
deep, with her tenticles
of the Sea, thence pulled
him down, with her locks of a
hundred fathoms long

Homecoming Day

San Diego, California
1977

"...Over the horizon, distant,
Where landsend crashes into sea,
Where Point Loma Lighthouse stands her vigilant post,
Came the USS Constellation, lads,
Rounding the point, pennant clad,
With squadrons of squawking seagulls astern;
And ladyship escorts tacking her homeport return

Refrain:
Oh, she were a fat-bottomed gal
And big at 'er beam
And she came home on sails of steam..."

"The ol' broad!" interrupted a third class nearby, laughing at himself, for sailors, from times of old, loved to hate their ships -- but never stopped at loving them -- and the girl standing there had missed that boat, for she was bringing *her* sailor back from the sea. As in many-a-time before, the young girl would stand with her stepfather and mother and one of Jack's girls, in the crowd awaiting…

And now a ways off all could see the sweeping RADAR nets spinning against the backdrop of Point Loma Hills, as the ship swept through the channel; her off-kilter, anvil-shaped figure cut a strange sight by the yachts at Shelter Harbor; cause she were a big ol gal, '*Connie' were and* She'd gone to fabulously contended waters, as if war was the Sea, and had returned some ten thousand nautical miles.

A tugboat led the parade of ships with its water jets turned on spraying a tall cloud of seawater's welcome.

"There she is!" cried a sailor's mother in the crowd, and amongst the sounds of newborn's tiny squeaks, girlfriend's nervous giggles, and parent's bragging sounded off all around her in the crowd as Molly strained to find him. Tugs nosed *Con around* the bend towards the quay wall, Pier J.

The Navy's West Coast Band, in formation behind them, began to boom in glory: 'The Stars and Stripes Forever.' Hundreds of

crackerjacks in 'summer-white' had manned the rails at parade-rest - in warships salute of old; and Molly was looking for him, her Jack.

…And Jack's name was known all around the Pacific Rim as can only be, for one who'd helped others, all the while 'doing time under the water-line' of drinks and desires. Tied was he to them - they were his family - along with the poor little orphans of Olangapo – and it was this giving that proceeded him over the wave trains; this unordinary heart upon these waters, which had returned – and she prayed the booze would have no sway over that.

For, they had hopes to keep their Jack in tow this time from troubles, in a wayward town by the 32nd street base, for Sailors had what her mother, Flo, called back then "The WestPac Fever" back then: free reign in the seedy towns like Olongapo and Subic Bay where cheap booze and sex could be had for ten pesos, and Alcohol flowed as if it were Kurushio Current. And sailors partied like there was no tomorrow. Could he be brought back from all this? Could it be done? Would it be done in sailor town, for Jack, my friends?

"There he is!" cried another father, finger pointing high to the superstructure, aloft.

"Where's Jack, Ma?" Molly asked.

"He's up there - somewhere." Said Flo looking high aloft.

"Oh yeah! I can see Daddy now!" another Navy brat said.

"Oh he looks so handsome in his uniform!" a mother glowed.

"I'm so proud of him!" maybe a grandmother said.

And now *Connie* loomed over them with her five to six thousand hand ship strength – a city – nay, a castle in herself, and the girl's mouth fell open, for it was like the ships lifeboats pods and turrets; Phalanx and armaments were battlements of a castle that had suddenly come upon them and she were larger and braver than life! And then she sounded her horn from her bridge on high, aloft.

"I might join one day." Molly uttered as she looked high above her and her mother scowled.

Then the tugs nosed Her in; while the details of line handlers tossed the big lines, and wrapped in a knot around the stevedores' necks. Then a 'waaamph' and tugs nudged *Connie* until her hull butted her long sides against the quay wall, big gal that She were; and they cinched her in at last. Then the crowd waited a time, a while and then gangways were lowered over like castle moats and a shrill boatswain's piping sounded all over the ship on the 1MC and:

"Liberty-Liberty…" cascaded a torrent of sailors downwards, with olive drab seabags slung over shoulders, and smiles wide spread wide upon faces, while into the crowd they

swayed, while the band boomed the Navy's unofficial song "*Anchors Aweigh!"*

Suddenly there stood her Jack over her with a broad smile turning to laughter, silhoetted by the undersides of the flightdeck high above.

"Little Mol!" he had cried and swirled her round and round like the little girl she just used to be, her yellow muu-muu caught the breeze like a sail.

"God, I missed you girl!"

And her world was complete, she breathed out, at last as she hugged him tight – ah, the world was all okay now that he was back, the place was so full of him, again and the world was spun right upon its axis.

Then he swept his girl, Bonnie, over for a kiss - as a sailor would on armistice day and she had squeeled "Jack!" even grabbing her skirt, and they all laughed at their iconic kiss. He gave long warm embraces for Molly's mother, Flo "It's about time you got your hide back here!" and he gave burly bear hugs for his cousin, Tim, Molly's stepfather, who was a chief 'in The Nav' as well.

The girls all managed to clutch him as they began to walk him towards their car, parked a mile away, leaving Tim to himself chuckling silently at this show of girlish devotion. 'Jack always had all that,' he thought as he searched his pocket for the car keys, the chief demoted to just a chauffer once again.

"Molly is as tall as Bonnie, now." Jack looked down to her under his arm.

"I can wear Bonnie's shoes now, Jack." Said she, looking up.

"Where did time go? Wasn't she little just yesterday, Tim?"

"Yep."

"How old are you now, Mol?"

"Seventeen, Jack."

"Seventeen! When I'm out to sea I get so out of touch!" He told her. "You're almost grown up! Where have I been!"

A group of his friends and some of his sailors came down the gangway together interrupting them. "Where's the LPO?" and one of them was pointing: "There he is! Check it out he's got *three* girls already!" and they gathered round Jack, smiling, amazed.

"Sh t, Jack! Are you gonna save some of the *resources* for us?" Boats said.

"Okay," Jack said grabbing his rugged wallet and divvying out their pooled funds, "Rick's getting the burgers. Chopper, you're go get the ice. Commisary's on the left by the main gate." He handed each a stack of dollar bills.

"Oh, and Landers, you and Flaco are getting the Brews." And he hand them dollars, "*American* Beer!" he stressed.

"What kind is that?" a kid named Condor joked.

"He just turned twenty-one, Petty Officer McCracken, and he's never even had one beer in America!"

"Shoot, I've almost forgotten what kind I like!" Jack said, turning to his cousin, Tim with a look of self-surprise.

"Coors, Jack!"

"Ah! Right!" He laughed to Tim, "Shoot, I've been overseas too long!"

And then Flo locked elbows with Jack and, laughing, towed him away. "Come on!"

"Hey! You be good, McCracken!" Jack's chief hollered across the crowd to him and many sailors were laughing heartily at him.

"Yes, Chief." He breathed out, red-faced and hunched over. "Jeez…" he muttered, then he shrugged it off and they walked him arm in arm down along the long quaywall. The day was glorious and downtown San Diego was spread out before them, sparkling across the bay.

"What a sight to see!" he cried standing there staring until they tugged him away. "I miss her, my San D!" Wouldn't she always be his?

They passed the *Kitty Hawk* along the way. Both Jack and Tim had been stationed on her at different times over the years, and Jack gave her a respectful salute adjacent to her gangway.

"Ah! Our old ship!" he uttered to Tim. "Gosh, I missed you, *Gurl*!

Then he told them his many anecdotes and stories of his journeys in the WestPac, for life a board a ship of 5000 or so young sailors was often very amusing, interesting or dangerous as the travelled the world wide on their cruises or missions landing jets in just about any kind of sea.

A half hour later they found the car almost at the back gate and they piled into the car and Tim swept off.

"God, it's good to be back!" he said luxuriantly stretching out his long arms way across the car, then reaching and tickling Molly behind the knee in the backseat, winking a green one at her.

"How long were you out this time?"

"Oh, twelve weeks!" Jack yawned just thinking about it, throwing his head back. "Tell me you've got a cig hun, will ya, Flo?"

"Yeah, here ya go, Jack." Her mom said, reaching into her large leather bag that had everything - and handed him one up front.

"Thanks, gal." He said smiling to her, gratefully and lighting up in the freedom of being home and not on a flight-

deck bouncing around in the WestPac somewhere; and he blew the smoke out the window luxuriantly, leaning back in the seat like a millionare - which he was, in a way. And Tim lit one as well, but he was a chain smoker, hooked like a Pacific Marlin.

"Deployments are getting longer." Tim said while negotiating the free-way like traffic leaving the big base into the constrastingly quaint island town of Coronado and his mind was still half on the numerous Evals he had to write this wild weekend, somehow. Tim drove past mansions where retired Admirals lived. One didn't get up there without hard work.

"What's going on with the deployments." His cousin asked a while later.

"Lots of Russian subs out there now." They were now pulling up to the high arching Coronado Bridge.

"Yeah…"

"Oh and guess what, the *Enterprise* collided with one the other day." He threw in.

"You're kidding me! Where?" Jack said overlooking from the high bridge as if he could still see it happening.

"In the EastPac - just off Baja, I think. Some skipper's career will hang for that one."

"Wow, they're getting closer in."

"I know. ComSevenfleet's [R] getting sorties every week."

"Gees, I don't know if I want to come home hearing that."

"Thought you should know." Tim said a bit fatherly.

"Maybe I should have got extended in Yokusuka." He said superstitiously to himself and Molly silently wondered the same, for there seemed to be something always hanging over him, in The States, as all sailors, they believed in superstition.

"Maybe, so…" he answered himself for, life was always simpler overseas than in 'CONUS' – the continental US - less REGNAV Sailors overseas, and of course, certainly less trouble.

"Naw, I just wanted to come home so bad, I could itch!" He'd been gone many, many years, coming back for visits, Christmas and courses at the Naval Training Center – NTC - over the span of time. "Gees, it's good to be on American soil again! Thought I'd *never* get home again!" He wanted to break the curse that had kept him his whole life overseas, he said to himself, yet denying all the while that there were such mystical things as curses – others called them shored-up words like 'destiny.'

The high Coronado Bridge arched steeply and banking like a plane at final approach delivered them into the shipyards of San Diego and finally towards the section of town that was theirs. "Ah!" he said leaning back with pleasure… there she was!

As they neared home Jack saw folks hailing him from the alley behind Keiloni's Lanai and holding an arm out boldly to stop his cousin, he popped out of the passenger door to greet

the town's own gambling crew, folks that their friend and poet Denny Fagen had given them all colorful names: Spooks, The Monster Lady and Mike Fiver; along with the tramps Carrion Carol and "Druling Joe" Druge who'd all come out of the alleyway worlds and were waiting for him all morning on that street corner to hail him homeward.

"There he is! Everybody, it's Jack!" They gathered around hugging him warmly.

He looked trim and radiant in his summerwhite crackerjack next to them - as if not one of them - talking to them as if he had no care in the world and still with the sway of the seas. After five minutes of that Flo called out from the backseat "You wanna stay here Jack?" He laughed and then shook their hands and he came back to the car.

"Enough socializing." Tim asserted and drove off with a slight lurch, Molly noted.

"Aye, aye, Chief." He teased recklessly as only he could, but he was always pushing his luck with everything and everyone.

They'd both been first class petty officers for many years now – equals, and it would seem, they were almost like twin brothers instead of cousins. But then Tim had finally made chief - up there – with the brass and the upper echelon who ruled 'The Nav'. Jack was left behind.

"The foods already ready at home." Tim explained.

"Woul--dn't want you to miss a meal." Jack snickered, poking to his cousin's belly. "You're beginning to look more and more like a chief e-ver-ry-day!"

"Shut-up Jack." Tim took his eyes off the road a split second.

"Wanna make me?" Jack said smiling into a dare.

"Yeah."

"Boys!" Flo called out from the back and then rolled her eyes to Bonnie, "Not tonight!"

Flo had driven them both to the ER in the Naval Hospital in Balboa once for bruised ribs many years ago, but the memory still irked Tim. "We'll talk later." Tim said and edged the car back to the middle of the lane. They'd both got sent to mast about that and it had made making Chief so hard!

"CincHouse hath spoken." Tim cracked back. And Molly translated slyly to Bonnie: "That's Navy for: 'Commander in Chief, House.'"

Bonnie giggled.

"Aye-Aye!" Jack laughed at his cousin's placid domesticity – something that had eluded him all his thirty-one years, for fifteen years he'd been 'in the Nav' -- the endless WestPac cruises and various duty stations in Asia.

The girls had packed ‘the galley’ with food, Tim’d manned the grill and all their friends and shipmates would come over and party drinking beers and shooting pool in the garage. It was like Fourth of July, ‘or sum-thun.’

Immediately as they got home, Molly went upstairs and took off the long yellow Muu-muu. Looking at it laying long on her bed, she recalled that it was neat to have traditions all of their own and yellow was the color that their girls of their little family always wore for all the many times they’d welcomed back their sailors back from long cruises, going all the way back to the time when even before her father had died. And they’d all worn yellow that day, well except Tim. And Jack had remembered even that little tradition, for he’d sent her several things like this, as the years had gone by; little things, always reminding them and reminding her, that he was ever their Jack.

And a sort of tradition all of her own, she pony’d her long hair and put on her well worn Padres baseball cap, and a long loose baseball t-shirt – despite her mother’s howls, she wanted to be that girl, that still kid, that would be Jack’s forever, even if she was growing up as rapidly now as the years piled up, for she’d show him in many various ways that she was still his, his little kid.

Downstairs in their big garage now partied some ten of Jack’s many friends from the ships all around. They had starting to drink and tell stories. But when Jack saw Molly come downstairs in he waved, arms wide open welcoming her, as always, high priority, into his world: “Come here, guuuurl!”

She sat down with him and Bonnie on the couch in the garage and he threw his arms thrown around them both while he yakked to his cousin and buddies playing pool, and occasionally kissed one of his girls’ heads as they clung to him to his sides. With Bon Molly could share her Jack forever, for, Bon, wisened like a palm tree by the sea, knew that Jack had always belonged to this girl and they were all a kind of little family of sorts, these three and, ah, the girls were happy now that he was back.

“How does he do that girls? How do you do that Jack!” Syd, the Hull Tech pointed the cue stick dramatically to the two girls by Jack’s sides: “Uno and Dos!”

“I dunno.” Jack said laughing leaning his head back on the couch, his adam’s apple pulsing. Then he suddenly jumped up and pulled off his jumper and neckerchief and was wearing his t-shirt. Molly stood up and took the jumper and neckerchief from him and hung it up carefully in the little closet that was Jack’s when he was in town. He was hard to keep her eyes off as

he strutted around in the garage in his tight t-shirt, with a pool stick in hand.

"Give us some charm lessons, for men, Jack."

"Ha!" Jack laughed and strutted around to get a cue stick.

Tim rolled his eyes, "Rack'em up, Syd."

Syd was now many rates junior to them – again - busted back down to a seaman apprenctice – on a failed piss test.

"Look, Jack always had *all* the girls, Chief! Everywhere we fricken sailed! Uh, sorry, Bonnie!" he said distraught holding the triangle up, fearing he'd ruined a secret life of Jacks.

"Oh, I know all about it." She told him smiling softly – for, she was a Mexican girl from National City – just outside the 8th Street Gate, and in her short time of twenty two years by the base, she'd seen it all – when it came to sailors.

"She's a strong one." Flo said, toasting Bon with a styrofoam cup, after setting down more burgers from the grill on the card table in the driveway. "You oughta keep a hold of her, Jack."

"Bonnie–Bonita, The Beaute" toasted Denny with his beer, Denny the Port Poet. "And to 'Black Jack' McCracken, who doesn't deserve her!" he cracked and drank up.

"Denny!" Jack said. "Hey!"

Molly smiled a bit collaborative, at Bonnie, for, while Jack had been gone overseas on this tour had become her and her mother's close friend. Bonnie had this quiet elegance about her, born of some other alloy of steel than most port-girls were made of, of that she was sure. But also Bonnie was giving that had made up for the balance between Mother and Kid – the kid that refused to grow up and be a girl!

"But all the girls always love Jack!" Syd joked again but in some frustration in his voice, mixing with the beer he cradled in his big hand." I've seen it for many years now across the seven seas! You ought to give classes in this charm or whatever it is you got." And he toasted Jack.

"I don't know what it is." Jack said, still smiling to himself – for he had a sort of magic of his own making - a potion – really - for devotion… and he laughed at it; gosh, he was so rich in it, whatever it was; there was no name for it.

"He's too free." Said Bonnie. Though most were getting lit up by the drink, no one could really figure out what she really meant, except Bon.

And then the two cousins played pool in the garage as they barbequed and their long time friends had arrived and gathered around – buddies of various ships stationed at the 32nd Street Base, such as: Famous Rick – a latin version of Peter Lorre and Jack's closest friend and rackmate from 'longago' on the *Kitty*

Hawk, with this big guy 'Sydney Syd' that Jack and Tim had both rescued drunken in the enlisted club in Agana, Guam many years ago, Denny Fagen – the British ex-merchant mariner, who's wife owned a pub in the Gaslamp District and he was a resident piano player and lush story teller in himself. And of course, Jimmy 'Give-God-a-Try' McIntyre 'the soberman' and a giant gantry crane operator at the NASSCO shipyards, who only drank Diet Cokes and rode his Harley up the Pacific Coast Highway with Jack and Tim. And, Ruby, Jimmy's beloved hunter, a beagle, sat by his ankles. Most were drinking, all were joking and she thought she'd never seen Jack and Tim more happy together, like perfect brothers, like in olden times.

Tim stripped took off his khaki uniform shirt for he could feel it brewing here - a contest of male wills. Flo clicked her teeth disaprovingly and took away his shirt; she knew.

"Cuz," Jack popped up from the couch and strode over to Tim, tilting his head: "You've been ashore tooooooooo long."

"Why do you say that?" Tim was leaning over to shoot the eight ball, but he stood back up. The beers were hitting him.

"Uh-oh!" gulped Molly, looking at Bon.

Jack brazenly poked Tim's belly again and then there was heard a 'Smack!' and a 'Boom!' and both careened off the starboard side of the pool table and hit the deck of the garage. They were rolling around and the gang of squids was yelling and screaming as they grappled for grips and taunted each other.

"Come on chubs!"

"Get-em, Jack!" Molly screamed.

"Gotcha!" Tim said in Jack's ear, he'd grappled behind his back for a grip. He'd been on the wrestling team in college and Jack's face was turning red. Jack was a kick-fighter and only one person had ever taken him down - Tim.

Everyone was cheering for Tim except Molly and Jack was turning quite red with anger, which only Molly, the expert in all things 'Jack' recognized as a bad sign.

"Here they go again." Flo commented deadpan to Bonnie, wincing as she watched, "All the time they're at it!"

"Yeah…" Bon laughed by her side. "Such boys!"

"Can you see us girls doing poop like that!"

"NO!"

And those two rolled down the driveway slope and Flo anxiously trailed after them, leaning over with her arms out to stop their roll should they tumble into the street! And all the crowd just laughed at her semi-mothering. "Mommmmmmmm!" one whined like a kid: "Tim and Jack are fight-ting a--gain!"

"I can't bear to look!" Flo said turning sharply away to Bon and everyone whooped it up and hollering even more.

"Have we ever wrestled together, Bon?!"

"No!"

"I'd like to see you two have a go at it! Go ahead!" joked Denny, and Bonnie just laughed.

"Have you ever wrestled even one of your friends, Bon? Ever??"

"No! Never!"

"Glad Jack's been in the WestPac. It's saved on my medical budget!" And with a pop of her lighter she lit up.

"I bet!"

And then Tim grappled Jack in a headlock from behind, and that's when Molly jumped through the crowd and straddled Jacks belly and was pinching his sides.

"Oh no, not that again!" and Jack contorted and twisted giggling and finally cried: "UN-cle MOR-tin!" and his cousin let him go and the crowd roared.

"Sticking your girl on me, that's cheatin'!" Jack said, lightly pushing Molly off and jumping up, red-faced and puffing.

"Nope," Tim said smugly getting up and dusting himself off, "It's called delegation, Jack," And he leaned forwards saying "That's what *chiefs* do."

"OOOOOOhhhhhhhhh!" Rick yelled. "Slam!"

"Ahhh, rub it in, will ya!!" Jack screamed back.

"*Petty Officer* McCracken." Tim taunted Jack smiling for once.

And all were laughing.

"*Chubby* Chief McCracken!!!" Jack said sticking his belly way out.

Now Tim was putting his arms on his hips, all Chief again.

Then Jack he was straightening his hair, pulling on his ship's ballcap, and laughing he was popping open, again, a San Miguel he tilted all the way back emptying it and then leaned over the green and took aim with his cue and sent two low balls in, and between turns he grabbed Bon by the waist and smacked her on the neck. They were his own family at his cousin's house and they had listened to his tales, the one and only Jack, for there were no one like him anywhere, well, except all the sailors of the 7th fleet.

And then later out on the town the fleet would all go - sailors by the thousandfold – to the imfamous Tivoli, the oldest pub in the Gas Lamp District, to the waterfront; all over town they'd go like a pride of young male lions - they were sporting for the sparing or the drinking in of their ol' glory and all of their seastories. From her bed in home, that night, Molly would hear all the sirens and scampers the whistles of the Shore

Patrol, thousands of sailors crowded the bars. Oh yes the fleet was back and they were alone no more!

One day she could go with them, when she was big, she thought and she went to her window at times during the long vigil they were out. The sirens of the San Diego police and Shore Patrol screeched agonizing trouble throughout the long night, until last call. Perhaps she could keep bad things at bay, as she had done a time or two in the past, if she just kept watch and awaited for bad times, when the drink savagely took Jack away from them all, once again.

All this carrying on went on until the night's end, which found them once again, undone, hungover on all this and fallen into the arms of the day.

And, as the sun was arising, she spied him through her bedroom window strut back home to them – he had always come back to his only family, to fall on their couch in the garage as he had for years and years, their so fine, drunken sailor Jack.

He'd always be hers and theirs, Molly thought standing over him again, later on that morn, with medicants of coffee and aspirin, and a young girl's devotion, watching him sleep it off on the couch; once again forlorn, fallen and like a little kid, he slept, all cuddled up, as if innocent of himself. And he had always been hers, you see, for though seaward as he had always been, for, he had always come home to she.

Though so young she was, looking at him there beneath her, on the couch she thought that maybe Jack was haunted by something, something chasing him the world's wide.

'Oh what my Jack?' she whispered to him. But he was lost to the drink.

Had something had happened to him over there, beyond the reaches of the sky? She had heard her mother talk of it once deep in the besodden night. Whatever it was… And this shadow of the unknown mystery had always kept in her young girl's mind to keep a lookout, a vigilance, a JackWatch - for trouble by the bottle-full, for a sailor in love and drunken with the sea:

[Put right here a hand-ink drawing of a picture of a destroyer, Frigate, Carrier, cruiser as kind of an interlude to break up the rather heavy detailed sections. Have some basic facts about it and how it figured into the ASW cold war that they were pursuing in this story and perhaps have it tied up at one of the piers in Singapore, Subic Bay, Yokusuka and or Okinawa. Luna Pier? Yankee Pier? This is to break up the sections and to remind the reader that this is about the Navy,

and Navy Land. Also in the picture, manage to have some intricate details of marlinspike seaman ship, like, say a knot decoration as a picture border, or, the lush marine life like on a Shellback Card.

Part I : WestPac Jack

Liberty, Subic Bay, Philipines, 1973

Liberty! Liberty!
Starboard Side liberty!

It was a night of glory – *all sailor style* – in the Sampaugita Club of Olangapo. And Tommy was drinking up with them again – his newly found friends, though he'd wouldn't tell his wife at home about them, that's for sure.

"To the Boat!" Tommy toasted.

"To the Boat!" They all cried

And they drank up and more toasts, to the boat to the sea, to anything, such was a time of revelry!

For they'd just pulled in from ops in the WestPac – the battle group COMCARGRU7 along with the USS ResearchName and USS OtherShips.

He was a nonrated sailor who on the flight deck was a fuel – purple suited and ordinance and they'd launched a sorties, hit two wakes of Typhoons and sauntered the lushly tropical Straits of Luzon – boy, they worked hard, terrifying hours and now they'd just explode into the P.I. as the Philipines were called, back then.

Now, he'd gotten the next door lady pregnant and had to ship out – to the Nav and to a very big boat floating out there; his was an ancient story.

He'd never fit in before this time in his life – he was interested in books and history, but suddenly he belonged, unlike all these new friends of his. But then he'd found out the savage lust of being a **on the Prowl** in Subic Bay.

[intro these words into this paragraph, tomcat, grabassing, prowl, horseplay, hijinks, 'Little Rascals-like nostalgia' (real human fraility as comedy) romps, revelry, swashbuckling]

They'd just done 3 long months to sea on Yankee Station off Vietnam and keeping the straits open for democracy. They'd launched a thousand sorties and went through three Westpac Typhoon wakes. And they had had about 3 minutes time off in all that span of time and they were exploding into the PI – the sailor's playground of the Pacific Ocean.

The task force had passed, that day, through the Straits of Luzon – Tommy had been thrilled to see it - they were passing

throught the site of the epic battles of the Pacific: where the USS_____ had sunk the Japanese __. It was here where MG MacArthor had vowed to return and it was here on this island where the Bataan Death March had ended. He took a long pull on the San Miguel and the history and glory rushed at him as he looked at the savage place he found himself in.

"Now what were we talkin' about? Oh, old dames," Jack was saying about their favorite subject that night: "And older dames and Tommy's married to one aren'tcha?"

"She's twenty eight."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two." He laughed. "We had to get married."

"Knocked her up?" Jed asked.

"Yeah." He laughed. Strange enough it was this fact alone that made him welcome in this group. Since he'd never belonged to anyone other than his wife he was relieved to have guys to hang out with on Liberty. He usually went out alone or with some other dorks. But Jack had made friends with him a few months back and they were becoming best friends lately. And Jack had even come home with them a five days pass last time they were in San D.

"How olds your kid?" Jed asked

"Molly's five."

"Woe!"

"You stud horse!" Waycross said. "Twenty two minus five… That makes you jail bait when…"

"I told her I was twenty-one." He laughed and they all did.

"You don't look twenty even now!" Jack teased.

"I lied." He even had fake ID when they'd met in the little bar down the street in Zanesville, Ohio for Tommy liked to drink.

And he laughed and drank up. "My wife doesn't look that old - does she, Jack? I honestly thought she was a varsity-cheerleader at my school."

"And you, just the innocent grocery bagger-boy, right? Getting laid by and older dame next door."

"Yeah." Tommy said laughing. The troubles of being a very young dad seemed all worth it now, with all that booze and glory flowing through him that night in the club with the boys, in Olangapo. And they were drinking more now, more than ever, and they were toasting him now, Tommy, the 5'8" stud horse!

"You think he's seen combat himself." A thick neck, muscled Marine name Gar was sitting nearby and drinking heavily. Jack had thick wavy blonde hair – parted down the middle like the stoners and barely regulation and it screamed offensively at the

shorn, ultra-military jarheads: 'Blueblooded Squid!' He looked as good as a movie star, He was too unbelievable. And they just hated Jack and they were not alone either.

The Recon Marines sitting there had just come back to their ship from JEF School – Jungle Environment School where they had lived out in the jungles, killing their own food – he had even killed and skinned and ate a dog, and ate a snake. They fought guerilla tactics exercises training for the firefights against the NVA, and now on liberty and were always iching to fight and to take down an arrogant squid like Jack. It didn't help that one of the local girls had suddenly switch-hit from Marine to Navy and that she had choosen Jack.

"The Marines over there are glaring at us." Tommy said.

"They're still mad at me about Suki." Jack shrugged.

"Oh come on they're all *working girls*!" Jed said. And they all had, many foul, but semi-military sounding acronyms to describe women of various races they encountered on their cruises - for they were no gentlemen. They were but sailors following an ancient path,just about, the ports were designed to follow them on their trade and supply all their needs - All of them - in *'Raunchy, ragged, sailortown."*

And Jed laughed: "She's a *WUBAF* – Woman Used By All Forces."

"Shut up, Jed!" Aaron said. "You're such a prick."

"Hey! They're all just whores." He said, drinking up to them, for Jed liked them just like that, actually. 'Once Jack dumps her, I'm playing for her.' He thought smiling hungrily.

"The Marines are *still* stairing at us Jack." Tommy told him.

"Ah, they just want to fight me." He said laying back deeply in his chair and yawning cockily "and, I'm not in the mood."

"What! Are you PMS'ing again, Jack!" Toby taunted.

"Yeah, I'm on my cycle again." He said grabbing his tummy in mock cramps and they all laughed and hollered and whooped it up.

And then he got up to use the head "Hey, Jack, there's a tampon dispenser in the female head, if you need it." Jed teased him.

"How would you know, Jed!"

"Cuz I went in there, Jack -- that's where the girls are!"

They whooped and hollered at that!

And Jack was laughing at that and grabbed Jed's neck from behind, playfully, and play wrestled with him.

Then he let Jed go was making his way through the throng, in the dark pulsing bodies that night, to the deep beat and swaying drunken Sailors and Marines all over intertwined with

the club girls, cigarette smoke and the musk of a roaring club at night on a dark tropical island in the deep, dank South Seas.

"Hi Ja--ck!" groups of girls called at him invitingly as he threaded his way back from the head and through the throbbing crowd and he waved at some of them and kissed another girl, Maria, on the ear and he grabbed her from behind and was smoking puffs from her cigerate and whispering in her ear. And she was giggling and wiggling up to him to the beat. Her perfume was hibiscus and he had his face deeply buried in the long black hair at the nape of her neck where all around the musk flowed over his face and her silken shape underneath his hands undulated to and fro and she was moaning softly in pleasure and he wanted to feel higher and higher with her and he went to get a drink, to wash this all down with.

"Be right back, love."

She spun around quick: "You butterfly me, sailor?"

"Butterfly?"

"Where butterfly land, Sailor?"

"On flowers."

"Land on only one flower."

He laughed at her poetry, kissed her memorably, and stepped away into the darkness and he rather floated over towards a swaying light where the bar was.

Suddenly Gar stepped in his path and attacked: "Where you going, McCracken!"

"I've got to powder my nose." And he sidestepped right around him.

He grabbed Jack's arm "I can whip your ass!"

"No you can't." he shook loose and he was turning to go.

"Yes I can!"

"Let's just agree to disagree then." He said over his shoulder but now he was laughing, so full of it, and the light was swaying him when he said it. Tommy had joined him and just rolled in his laughter and the Marine menaced him too, but they strutted away laughing.

"So, you're just a couple of smartass squids."

He turned back around smiling said:

"Well, it's better than being a *dumbass*!" he quipped and:

"Whooooooooooooosh!"

Jack swiftly ducked the left hook Gar threw at him and he taunted back:

"Misssssssed--Me!"

"Ha! Ha!" Tommy laughed, which exploded like lighting strike a fuse of dynamite and Gar lunged for him, but Jack tripped him up.

When he got back his balance he turned deep red: “I’m going to kick your ass, McCracken!” he screamed “Get your ass out to the alley!”

“I’m sor-ry she preferred me to you.” Jack said sarcastically

Just then the contested Suki chose to come in all dressed promiscuously, seing them fight and jumped right in between them.

“Oh, shit!” Jack looked up seeing her dressed like that.

“Great timing! Look, Suki, you need to go back to your guy.” And he pushed her towards Gar.

“I no go back! I go with Jack!” she had a little girl from another sailor to feed.

He leant over her, trying to sweet talk her while gently pulling her to Gar a few feet away. And the other girl, Maria, was cursing her in Tagalog and began leading her to Gar.

“Hands off!” she hissed and was now trying to slap him in the face, but he grabbed her little hands with his big ones and she began to scream at him!

And then all the Marines all jump up and in an instant the entire club was on its feet, gawking and The Seven had joined Jack’s side.

“Done with her now?” Another marine taunts him as she is slapping at him.

“Hey, at least I didn’t lie to her about marrying her!”

“He no lie!” She screamed and the crowd roared.

“He does!” Jack screamed back and she slapped him on the side of the head on the ears to the pleasure of the crowd. He actually saw stars. And then Maria was yanking her hair and screeming at her in Tagalog.

“Hey, slap him. He’s the liar!” Jack yelled at her grabbing her wrists again to stop her wild slapping.

“That’s bullshit McCracken!” Gar cried and they jump up insulted “Get your ass out there!”

And the buff Marine part time bouncer came screaming “You take that outside you two!”

“Hey! If I win I want a free round for our table!” he screamed at Gar loudly for all to hear. He wanted to at least get a free drink - if he could - out of this fight. And Maria kissed him good luck.

“You’ll be lucky if he doesn’t kill you, McCracken!” Knuckle Face screamed.

“You’re messing with a Recon Marine!”

“So what!” Jack yelled back cockily. And the Marines in the bar were repetitively chanting “Hu-Rah! Hu-Rah! Hu-Rah! Hu-Rah!”

And they all stampeded out for the back alley behind the club as did most of the entire club emptied out back and another

Marine bouncer grabbed and dragged the wild screeching Suki outside.

They had the bar almost to themselves now. “Well, guys…” he took a long swig. His friends were looking up to him. “See any Shore Patrol?”

“Not yet.”

And he put the drink down and strode slowly out of the empty club with Maria and his seven guys all behind him, fists all curled, there he found nearly a hundred people awaiting him: Sailors, Marines, Airmen and Philipinas from the various clubs.

“Dang it, guys.” Jack said smiling at all this before him.

“Wow.” Jed said back.

Tommy gulped and thought of his wife.

“I think they’re needed a few lessons in manners, whatta you think, guys?”

“Let us get our hands on them!”

Then a huge wave rolled into the crowd and it was Sailors upon Marines and Airmen on Sailors and so on, they flew upon each other, while many others – military as well as civilian Philipinos stood back in a big circle around them and enjoyed a spectacle of another battle being waged before them. At least twenty guys were all in a rumble before them and they howled and yelled taunts for the various sides they took.

“Sempre Fi!” Capshaw screemed as he went on in.

“Sempre Fi!” Brett screemed back as he kicked Jed and the belly, who flew backwards.

“Apple Pie!” Jack quipped, to Tommy, picking up Jed.

“In your Eye!” Tommy said back taking a swipe at Brett who sent him flying to the ground was a left hook he didn’t see coming.

Gar dove for Jack’s legs but Jack got his legs under the Marine and lunged him across the circle, Tommy began shaking hysterically at this and then he took on an Airman nearby from behind who was smacking Toby and was wrestling him to the floor and where Tommy turned his head and saw Jack fall very prone on his back but he grabbed a rock from the dirt and threw in at the Marine that knocks him in the side of his face with a thud.

“OOOOOOOOHHHH!” The crowd disaprooved loudly!

Jed taunted: “Hey, it’s an RPG Jar--heads!!”

Jack jumped up. Here the grunt throws studied punches, but Jack ducks the swipes with quick feet and taunts him “Come on, Marine, show me your stuff!” and the crowd is roaring at this! Jack is dancing around him, light on his feet for such a stocking guy and ducks the full force gabs of the Marine, to the crowds delight.

“Are you going to fight me or not!” Jack yells.

“Get your butt over here and I will!”

“She liked me better than you, Gar!”

“Shut the h___ up.”

“Make me!”

Tommy had the Airman on the ground, and another guy was jumping on Tommy’s back, but Jed backed him up and pulled the other off Tommy and took him on himself and pulled a ‘John Wayne’ roundhouse on him.

Jack got a solid kick to Gar’s ribs – he thought he felt a crunch and he backed up to the edge of the crowd to stop, but the crowd shoved him back into the middle! But the Marine was really tough and suddenly he is on his feet again and on the rampage.

“You frickin freak!” Jack screamed furious now, spins around and yells and they are now boxing and dancing around each other again, both bleeding. ”Are you fighting to the death then, Gar!”

“Your mine!” The Marine was now fighting for wounded pride and Jack, for the ship, for the boat, that sailors would take no sh*t and for some five to six thousand men audience aboard and he kicked him again, he had a 75 inch reach – his secret weapon he hadn’t lost a barfight yet!

Then Tommy lobbed an empty beer can over the heads of the fighters which bounded off a head of one of the young male Philipinos in the crowd standing all around and suddenly the entire crowd was fighting, and the young club girls were screaming and fleeing into the night!

Such were the weekends in Subic Bay when the American Fleet came back in from patrols off Yankee Station. Permanent party sailors rotated Shore Patrol Duties when the fleet came back, such were the weekends when the fleet came back. The maelum, the roar the din of the fight of a fleet still at war, which seemed nigh of fourty years.

Suddenly the shrill whistles of the Shore Patrol sounded and a bunch of Marines jumped them.

But behind the Shore Patrol was a company of Marines in riot gear flying out of the vans at them!

Now the entire crowd was scrambling wildly into the night and some Marines were picking up Gar up!

“Hey, what about our free round!” he dared.

“Screw you!” One said over his shoulders as he ran off.

“You not getting your girl back, then, Gar!”

“F___ you!”

“This ends now!” he screamed across the alley.

But, then the sirens went off all over town!

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-aaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!!!!!!!!”

"Oh shit! Run for it guys! Run for the beach!" Jack screamed as they scrambled across 'Shit Creek' and down along Mikasa street and a few alleys.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-aaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!!!!!!!!"

"Everyone split up!" Jack cried. "Meet us at the beach!"

And Tommy ran with Jack and Toby all along the twisting alleys and back streets, laughing, bruised, the sirens were wailing in the air all around them. And they stopped at dark corners and took gulps of rum and ran some more.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA=aaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!!!!!!!!"

The sounds of scampering sailors and marines were all over the place and the wail of the sirens of the SP vans filled the night.

Finally they all met up on the beach, was quiet and they could here the sirens and the maelum from a bit of tactical distance and they stopped running, huffing and puffing and somewhat sobered up the moon was full and they could see Subic Bay and the Task Force moored out there as well.

"Thought they had us this time." Jack said huffing and puffing.

"Good thing we found this spot!" they were all wheezing.

Jack was pulling out a bag still huffing.

"Whatcha got there, Jack! A couple of bottles of rum?"

"You guessed it." In the scamper he had still managed to buy a couple of flasks of _____ from a stand.

"Wow!" they cried, impressed.

"Bravo Zulu, Jack!"

And they were busting them open out there on the beach – and the fumes swooned them under their spell and they were toasting each other and Jack: "To the big fight!"

Tommy lifted the flask up to the moonlight and its beams lit the bottle like crystal: "Guess I'm gonna quit, Jack."

"Quit what?"

"Quit quitting!" and they all toasted each other in the moonlit night.

Tommy locked arms to his comrades at both of his sides, Jack on one side, Jed on the other and he felt the lush pride to be cast with this lot of badcat sailors – rebels with real causes for, arm in arm, they were striding back into town, in a long row, swaying with the glory of the drink and of the fight, and Jack leading them; then, swaying together, arm in arm, they came down the pier where their ship lay-to, welcomed them and guys were yelling to them 'Nice Fight!" And, then, as their shipmates were cheering, words of lush, drunken poetry flowed through Tommy's young head:

Young and wild and fine and free
Down the pier, in arms,
Strode we!
And,
I was one of them!

In the Brig

And near the gangway to the ship the lead Shore Patrolmen yelled: "Come on!" to his ten SPs and ran in force and the LPO hit Jack in the stomach with a baton who fell to the deck before them in a heap.

"Shit, Murchison, did ya hafta hit me so hard?" he gasped doubled over on the pier deck.

"You were resisting arrest, McCrakken."

"What!!" he choked.

Now Toby was hauling him up by his arms while his friends were all being cuffed.

Jack laughed in outrage "No I wasn't! I was just standing there, dude!"

Murch was hauling Jack's arms behind his back and cuffing him. "Well, the word is that you started the whole fricken rumble!"

"What??!"

"That's what EVERYONE is saying!" and the guy pushed him forwards to the ramp.

"What!" courts marshalling time!

Now they were now coming up to the gangway of the *Kitty Hawk* now. And hundreds of sailors were getting back from the clubs seeing The Seven come out spot-lighted by the pier lights cuffed with the shore patrol.

"Nice fight, McCracken!" someone called out and a bunch cheered at him.

"Shut up!" Murch screamed back to them.

"Thanks." Jack said lowly, his stomach aching, his arms aching behind him, fearing for his life! For, he was nothing without the Navy! Nothing! Gosh! Why did he do that -- again!!! And, he was amazed that The Seven had hung together and had not run away when they easily could have or, even should have, and suddenly they were all celebrities coming onboardship, passing the Quarterdeck that night. Maybe they could vouch for him?

"Hey! There's those guys who fought the Marines coming up the gangway!" Jack and the guys went up the ramp and into the bright lights.

"Damn, who says squids can't fight!"

"Hey, McCracken, what ship were the jarheads from?"

"A gator!" he spat back to them; meaning an LPH, a carrier for helos "*The Peleliu.*"

"We spit on the gator, McCracken!"

And the SPs put them all in the brig onboard for the night. And they couldn't stop drunkenly whispering about it for hours and hours amongst themselves. And in the morning they all sported bruises and it was all his section would talk about as they left for the sea in the next few months and how the tale became embellished with time, until it was almost mythic 'round the rim' of 'The big fight in town.'

In the Brig

And, of course, Jack and The Seven all went to Captain's Mast and got their requisite Article 15s the next morning.

Tommy had to scrub the chief's messdeck for his extraduty and he caught a few words coming through and air vent from the big chiefs meeting the next morning – and he climbed under the scullery and had his ear pressed to the vent. And he reported back to Jack who was still in the brig – on bread and water - and begged the Marine Sentry to let him talk to him.

"You got 5 minutes flat, Squid."

"Thank you, Corporal Torres." He replied and the sentry let him into the passageway before the cells. He called through the little windows:

"Hey, Jack."

"Tommy! Hey! Thanks for coming!"

"I've got some good news for you, Jack."

"How could there possibly any good news for me!"

He lowered his voice: "Master Chief of the boat vouched for you Jack."

"He did!! What did they all say - *exactly*? Start from the very beginning, Tommy."

"Well, at first your chief said he wanted to can you."

"Of course he did! The prick!"

"But then the Master Chief said to him 'McCracken's uniform always looks sharp and he's got real leadership potential."

"Really?" Jack asked. "He said *that*?"

"'Yeah, then your chief said back "He can clean up real good, Master Chief, but McCracken's nothing but a drunk.'" Jack's Chief had said.

"I wanna kill that prick!" Jack said punching his rack fuming, now he really wanted to fight somebody! And he was pacing around the cell like a wild dog.

"Quiet down in there!" cried Cpl Torres yelled.

"Hey, calm down Jack. It's just prick Summerstreet spouting again." He said with his hand on his friend's shoulder through the bars. "Come on, Jack, come on. You gotta let them win this one!"

"I'm trying!" his hands were in his hair "Oh, God! I didn't even want to fight him! Remember?" he was fuming again around the cell way out of control. "Remember!?"

"I know."

"Hmmph!"

"It's going to be okay, Jack. Another thing I overheard is that the Marines aren't advertising it by pressing charges."

"Pressing charges!" he cried.

"I said it was going to be okay, Jack."

Tommy looked at his friend trapped behind bars and pacing like a wild animal. These guys were so different than him, they were so much more worldly, even decadently so. Sometimes, no, a lot of times, he missed his books at home, with his cuddly little wife and life… but, then they had had the kid…

"Look, Tommy, you're my best friend, don't ever let me get in a fight like that again, okay? No matter how drunk I get, I just can't loose my career over a big mouthed Marine, okay?"

"Okay, Jack."

Jack sighed, but, it seems he always had his friends around him, and well, perhaps it wasn't so bad afterall.

"Thank you, Tommy." Jack said gulping. "Thanks for helping me."

"No prob. Jack."

A sailor winning a fight in Olangapo in such a dramatic way – well, back the bought him a lot of fleet prestige and Jack became ravenously popular with his ship, while he kept his seven tight mates together and they, well loved him. He was upside down but landed right and his world, back then, was on the side of Seaman Jack McCracken.

Well, except his chief – he'd never done well with direct authority figures anyway and, probably, soon enough 'The Old Man' would be transferred and his troubles would fade away as the ship pulled out and ploughed the seas, for that was the 'Old Navy' back then after the great world wars.

Extra Duty

Knowing that his chief was out to fire him, Jack played the only card he could – of humbled resignation - as he used to as a kid. So when the chief hauled him into his office when he got out of the brig he just hung his head low and said little – a way of Nolo Contendre – no contest, no defense, for you have judged me in your mind already, I have given up on mercy from you.

"Yet another fight on your record, McCracken."

"Yes, chief." He looks at the welded seam of the desk.

"I think you are a good-for-nothing drunk, McCracken."

His face burned with indignation for a few seconds but he focused on the seam of the desk, this is what the guy wants – another fight.

"Well, what have you got to say about that, Seaman?"

Jack shook his head and looked at the deck now.

"And why should I not can your ass?"

"I don't know." He says, the master chief is on his side.

"Don't give me that bull!" the chief gets up and is standing inches from Jack's face – taunting him now.

"If I punched you now Jack, no one would believe you! Do you realize that!!"

"Yes, chief." And he tensed his stomach up for another blow, to the chief's delight.

"Ha!"

He snaked in closer, almost under his very nose and said:

"You better make me forget that I *hate* you." He whispered menacing into Jack's ear.

"You hate me, Chief?" Jack was genuinely curious on that. He'd never been hated before – well, except by his old man and he couldn't stop himself from looking over into his chief's beady brown eyes for an answer. He noticed, then, how unconsolably ugly Chief was and it had reminded him of something someone had whispered to him about his company commader in formation on the grinder in boot camp in San D once, after 'cycling' him'in front of the company for ten minutes:

'Never trust any man that can't EVER get laid -
because they WILL screw - the hell out of you!'

"Yeah, asshole. I *hate* you! That's right! And you want to know why? It's cuz you think you have it all, that everyone loves you, envies you, wants to be in your little group…"

Perhaps what he said was true and he swallowed that and he suddenly looked up with a joke on himself. "Don't they, Chief?" he smiled, humbly.

"No!!! You arrogant prick! You make me ashamed to be in the same damn Navy as you – with all your fighting and carousing!"

"Yes, chief, Jack said, genuinely, looking down in humble agreement, or at least trying to be so. "That was bad of me."

"Don't try to *con* me with that 'I'm sorry' shit, cause I ain't buying even one of your apologies!"

"Yes, chief."

"You've probably already gotten a couple of island girls knocked up by now!"

"Oh, no sir, Chief!" he cried, startled, *but there were already a few times when it'd been really close! Several times!*

"What do you think the P.I. is some kind of big brothel for you to carouse upon!"

He was not getting any sex, Jack realized - not even here!

"I despise you!"

Pitiful was the word. And, so Jack smoothered a soothing smile back, which made the chief cringe!

"Damn you, McCracken!" and he pounded the desk. "You're just too much!"

And then he outlined Jack's extensive extra duty he'd got a Captain's Mast that morning. "You're going to make me forget that fight?"

"Yes chief." He stood there while the pissed off chief watched him intently and chewed on the remains of his career like a cigar.

He stood at attention intently focused on a picture of the Kitty Hawk hanging there on the bulkhead. He should focus, for he wanted to stay aboard her!! He had no where else to go! He had no other life than this!"

"But I am sorry about it, chief." He said with conviction.

"Yes, you will be!"

"Yes, Chief."

"Scram!"

And Jack about-faced, left the compartment. He was quite dizzy as he walked the main passageway and many ladders back to his rack. He'd change into his dungarees and would start on the extra duty right away. There must be an easier way to live ones life than this.

As he did his swabbing many folks would pat him on the back in encouragement, which went a very long way for Jack. His shipmates were closer to his family than anyone else, and that was as good as any brew!

And to his chief's chagrin, his mast did not diminish Jack's popularity on board! Other First Classes and even his own LPO – who got an ass chewing for that one! He hated McCracken so, that he wanted to bust him right out of the Navy! When he had gone on liberty he had hated the idea that McCracken was out there, somewhere, brawling or spoiling young girls, or worse,

making more Amerasian babies!! He hated that he had to share liberty in lush, beautiful tropical ports with sort like McCraken, period. It ruined it time and time again, the wildness of the fleet! But the Master Chief had said McCracken had real leadership potential! What! 'What about me!' he said to himself. "I worked damn hard to make Chief!' It was all about charm and good looks and Jack's chief just hated him for that.

Jack he began to look around paranoid and began hiding out from the chief and from everyone, arranging with his LPO to do the extra duty at night – when he was really tired.

And it was another extensive WestPac Cruise – with lots of flight ops and sorties in the Straits and of all the cruises, it would not be one of his favorites; not only was he bone-tired from all the extra duty, it was one of the more stormy seasons of his career of WestPacs, so far, which fueled with the Typhoon Season were as rough as the seas can be – anywhere in the world.

Oftentimes, though, Tommy found him and when nobody was looking helped him get his duties done and when he couldn't help him, he just hung around and gave him company while he worked and Jack was really grateful for that.

Finally they were back in Subic Bay and Jack could really get in a lot of time to get his 'chores' done and ignored all the guys going ashore to kick some butt and save his career, if he could, and he was sweating away at almost midnight alone but busting butt and getting poop done.

Before their liberty was up, Tommy found Jack painting the starboard line locker. Tommy was yawning and looking bored and – he had even changed back into his dungarees to help him.

"Hey Tommy, you're still on Liberty, whatcha doing back so soon!" He said whipping back the needle gun away from his friend.

"I was just bored."

Jack stopped "Bored?! In Olangapo!!?"

"Yeah, well you know I'm a married man, Jack."

"I know, but you can look but not touch. You're not dead, you know, just cuz your married."

Tommy laughed, "Well, Jack, I kinda get carried away with those cute little Asian chicks when I drink and Flo's everything to me Jack."

"I know."

"She's the only one who's ever belonged to me – besides Molly." He sighed: "I'm kinda an orphan Jack. I have no family at all."

"Okay Tommy, but you should at least go out and enjoy being off the ship."

"I am going to - I came back early so I can hit the _____ tomorrow."

"Oh, that's cool. Wish I could go to."

"You know Jack we're surrounded by history here."

"Uh-huh." He was resuming painting.

"I find it real interesting – look, Jack, for instance and he pointed to a_____ and a _____

"This is where _____ happened and where."

He glanced out the _____ while stowing away the gear for the night, now tired and spent and wanting to hit the shower and his rack ASAP. But Tommy kept talking and talking of this and that and WWII, and the Japs; soon, though, Jack was telling him of his own windjammer cruise on the '*Dar Mlodiezy*' at his great long cruise all around Northern Europe, climbing the three story masts and reefing sails in high seas and visiting ancient ports like Spitzbergen, Krackow, Hamburg, Bremen and Bremerhaven, Germany and Scotland.

Hours passed now between them as they. Story after story, tale after tale they told on the deserted rail side of the ship looking out in Subic Bay. Jack told of his friends and Tommy of the great and battles the Navy and Marines had fought in these south seas of the Western Pacific.

"I really envy you. You've been in the real romance of the sea. I really think all that marlinspike seamanship is dead, Jack. Our ships are big metal cans with no beauty or grace, no tradition or lore… except for what happened in WWII…"

"You know Tommy," he said scratching his chin, "I don't think so at all."

"It seems so dull here, so tedious, Jack. I can't hardly stand it anymore."

"Just you wait, dude, until we get underweigh again, Tommy and go up across 'The Line.'

"The Crossing the Line Ceremony?"

"Yep. You'll see what I mean, Tommy."

Then Jack got through this extensive punishment and he missed the next Olongapo liberty being confined to ship.

And he looked out over Subic Bay wondering if he was always going to have to hide his high flying personality the rest of his tours from chief and other lifers who didn't like his charisma or, were truthfully terribly envious of his ways with folks – that his shipmates and girls loved him and would follow him, anywhere he would go.

Chiefs seemed like Dad all over again, everywhere he went, who'd hated him having all those friends and endless parties on

the street where he had grown up on in Germany, hated all his friends, but he envied him and hated him so.

He stood there watching the palms sway in the wind and then restarted swabbing the aft main lounge and the bridge had just announced another liberty for Starboardside. As he swabbed some of his seven friends were waving to him and he sighed waving back and went back to the deck resumed swabbing.

"Bet you'd like to go with them." He jumped. Chief Summerstreet had come up behind him and he had been startled - to the chief's delight.

"No, Chief." He said looking down to resume his swabbing.

"Don't lie to me, McCracken." The chief was in his shorts and was taunting him now. "I hate liars, and you're one of the biggest right in front of me, Liar."

"Yes, Chief." He said still looking down and resumed swabbing.

"Yes, you are a Liar."

"Yes, Chief."

And chief bored down to look into Jack's eyes intently and said quietly and menacingly: "No, a better name for you McCracken is 'Cheater.'

Oh, shut up! He thought. Enough is enough of this!

"Yes, chief." Jack said humbly resuming his swabbing.

The chief walked right over the wet deck, ruining it:

Jack sighed and resumed swabbing.

"Cheater, go get on your Summer Alphas and report to the OOD right now."

He looked up in alarm "Have I missed duty, chief?"

"Nope." He smiled "Your extra duties are done. This is a new duty, Cheater." And the prick left him there wondering.

"Yes, chief." And he poured the bucket into the bilge and stowed the swabs, shaking, wondering why the chief had been smiling so. What was next? Damn that guy really hated him and he didn't understand it at all. '*What had I done personally to him?*'

"Seaman McCracken reporting as ordered sir." He said to the young LTJG on the Quarter Deck. Not even acknowledging him at all, the little kid/prick made him stay there waiting – like a dork - for several minutes while he shuffled some papers around, dug in the ship's logbook. Standing there at attention he tried to repress the rather lucid imagination he had of taking the officer-kid over his knee for impersonating a JG. What did this guy have that he didn't? Just a few more years partying at college, that's all, Jack thought.

"Oh, you're the new announcer guy." And the JG put a check by his name on the roster.

"Sir?"

"Yeah, you're going to do all the 1MC announcements."

He stood there stunned. "That's all -- sir?"

A first class came up to him, he was a QM – a Quartermaster a rate that Jack had put in a chit for to strike for several months ago, so he could learn the rate on the job, and had forgotten about it entirely – it was two fights ago - two Subic Bay fights, ago.

"Yes, Master Chief likes your 'Hollywood' McCracken and you're going to do them all, from now on.'

"Oh, I thought I was in trouble again." He admitted.

"You're that fight guy, aren't you." Oscar the QM1 LPO was saying. "That big fight at the Sampaugita Club, right?"

He looked down and resumed his two long months in penance stance – looking down and sighing.

"Hey, man, don't worry about it anymore. You're with us now."

He looked up "What?"

"Yeah, this is your new department." And, a chance to start over, was what he was really saying.

"Really?" That's why Chief Summerstreet had been smiling – he'd gotten rid of him.

"Look, just don't fight anymore, okay?"

"Yes, Petty Officer Oscar!" he boot-camped his reply and he stood at attention, involuntarily.

"Look, all you have to do is report on time and do your work and we'll all get along. It's just as Simple as that." And he held out his hand as if all this were but a walk in the park.

Jack smiled a little nervously in big surprise and put his hand out to his new boss, feeling that he could win with *this* guy.

"And you can start striking for QM now."

"I can?!" he'd go grab the books right now from the career counselor's office!

"Affirmative, Jack." I want the 3&2 done in two months."

"Aye-Aye!" he said, his smile for real.

And time went by peaceably like this, there was now time to study his courses on watch on the bridge. He was now way up high on the bridge and rather isolated from all his friends beneath the waterline and it helped him study. And it was such a nice atmosphere for his great new LPO and Jack actually could concentrate and despite the heavy seas of Typhoon Season in the WestPac, he got almost all his coursework done for the rate and extensive OJT and the striking bill and was on his way for a promising career in the Navy. In addition to all this he did all the announcements and the entire ship heard Jack's voice many

times a day. And that's where it all started for thousands of sailors now knew Jack across the wide open WestPac.

Aux One

But he still got hazed by 'management.'

"Go wipe down Aux 1, McCracken." Another chief was telling him.

"Aye-Aye." He grabbed his rags and spray, hopes dashed at getting any liberty that others were getting. Oscer, his new LPO had gone to sickcall and was on bedrest so Jack's section reported to Chief Maxwell, a crony of his former Chief Summerstreet, who didn't seem to like him much. Oh, well, at least I have the place to myself, he thought and went to work on the greasiest and most visible spots and was well on his way to actually enjoying himself in the work – it didn't require attention span whatsoever and this was comforting. Perhaps if everyone from the brass saw him busting his butt all the time they'd forget that they hated him for the big fight. I've gotta grab something out of this, he reasoned to himself, something, something… anything!

About two hours later, after he got his second installment of coffee when his new gang of guys came upon him. To Jack's misfortune he had told one of them that he had once lived there for a short time and knew where all the clubs were.

"Hey, there he is." McClellan was pointing to him from two decks above.

"Yeah, there he is, what's he doin' in his dungarees?"

"Oh, too bad he can't come with us."

"How much longer you got, Jack?" they were yelling at him above the roar of the generators.

"A while." He said looking up from the job.

"Whatta you gotta do?"

He gestered with his rags around the half of the compartment. "Still got half to do."

"Come on." Ray grabbed some rags. "Let's help MCCracken get it done."

"Hey, I'm not sure they're gonna like this!!" he was saying.

"To heck with 'em Jack!"

"Come on – stop – go onto liberty guys!"

"Not without our *tour guide*!"

And all twenty came down and descended on the compartment Thus a half hour later it was all done and Jack was wiping his hands. But, he was just dreading talking to the chief, but he had to now!

"Chief, I'm done with Aux One, may I go on liberty now?"

"You're not done!" he was turning red as his father would.

"Check it out for yourself, Chief." Jack said with his rags in hand. And chief stormed two decks down and around to the space. "You missed this spot and this one and this one!" and he looked around to see all the guys skylarking around - a deck above, in liberty gear. "Get lost douchebags!" he roared over the generators, but they didn't 'hear' him.

Chief came back ten minutes later to find all twenty sailors hitting the spots in their liberty gear. It reminded him strongly of Tom Sawyer!

"You guys can't be helping him!" Chief roared. "I ordered you to scram!!"

"Why not, Chief, we're on liberty, can't we do what we want to??" a second class was saying.

He was stumped on that one - after twelve years in the Nav!

"I'm not on any kind of extra-duty anymore, am I chief?" Jack said, "So why can't they help me?"

Chief looked around at all his eager followers, "What do you guys need him for, haven't you got enough girls for yourselves!"

"He knows where all the girls are."

"Shee-yit!!!!!!!!"

"Come on, Chief!" The second class was saying.

He had no grounds to stop them! He looked at them – and they all knew it too! Damn! They demanded him and McCracken was nothing but trouble!

"You get in the slightest bit of trouble, just the slightest and you all will get on my shit-list for fifty hours, Got it?"

"Sure, Chief!"

And Chief watched them eagerly packed up the cleaning gear, stowing the rags and swabs and an hour later follow Jack across the brow and onto the pier.

Liberty - Hong Kong(?)

He had trouble putting the chief out his head – even though he was PCSing soon – he'd bitch to the masterchief probably. Dang!! And, then these other guys wanted him to show them Hong Kong that he had lived there one summer with his father a while back and they were eagerly following him down the pier. He felt the pressure heavy to entertain them well, and yet, not get in a lick of trouble – like be UA again, and so he strutted swift down the backstreets he'd known as a kid, his long legs carrying him fast and they all fell behind him.

"Dang it Jack! Hold up! Hold up!"

"Wanna slow up?"

"Naw! Lets go!" and they trotted back up to him.

He could still remember his Hong Kong quite well, they were a sort of labyrinth of his childhood, like the port in Germany, where he had roamed for years, completely free as a child – while his mother drank - and had seen so much and remembered so much of the world outside of America, a far off places like Keflavik, Iceland, Spitzbergen at the top of the world and the steamy hot Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico.

He was looking around as he he were back home, one of his many homes away from America!

In fact he hardly knew America at all, which was so strange to him, for he loved his country, as he loved 'The Nav', and he threaded alleyways back to the bars that catered not to the superrich but to the local sailors, like they, themselves or the expatriot mariners who had settled there after the World Wars, some of whom had supposedly won their bars in mythic Poker games, or just bought them when they were dirt cheap after the war and were still living since a sort of White Man's Paradise amongst the Asian beauties all around, well known for their deference to the man.

Though he'd known them ten years before, they'd probably still remember him and his tall father, who'd put in there a few times in his Military Sea Lift Command. His father was a regular there, when he had been in the Nav. And he was remembering a girl there too, would she still be around – and what would a decade in a seedy place like this do to a girl like her?

And when he came through the doors of Dabbles'Club 'WestPAC HQ' some ancient, decrepit exsailor greated him "Jack! Jack's Back!" to the amazement of his shipmates, "Wow!" and he embraced him

"You're a sailor, Jack!"

"Yep."

"*Sailor-Sailor* Jack!!"

"Bettybrook, these are all my shipmates from the *Kitty Hawk*!"

"Welcome! Welcome to Hong Kong!" They all shouted and the guys in the bar all got up and embraced them like long lost cousins. American sailors, they had once been, they gathered all around them, missing them, long outcasts, they had missed them tremendously! Secretly regretting their lives overhere trading revelry and the exotic for the fine freedom of the seas and their stateside ways, they missed them well! They really wanted to go home, bad.

Jack's gang all got rounds and rounds for free! They were swimming in the drink in the place of afar off – round after

round and then girls came around them, seeing the blond, the fair haired tall ones, eager, and though he was quite tipsy Jack would hafta chase after them, again and again, ragging them – "Hey, don't be disapeering on me!"

"Ah, Jack! Your're acting like the masterchief!" they were exotic asian creatures and he was even pulling Derrick, the second-class, back. "Look, man, we hafta stick together, dude!"

He asked about her, was she long gone? No one did know what ever happened to the girl. She had disapeered, swallowed up in vast Asia. Billions of people lived there, as foreign to them as aliens from another planet, and yet, he had known her well. And well, he missed her now, something sweet.

"No fighting." He told himself as they passed a gang of Marines in the streets.

And, believe it or not they had all made it back before liberty ended – this time. And not one of them could stand up straight as they came across the brow and to the Officer of the Deck. And the next day they had headaches, hangovers and duty and a stashload of stories to tell. Ah, Liberty and the young, tall sailor man!

The Rogue Wave

For every sailor there is always that one storm they cut their teeth on, that one storm above all others - in a life at sea of storms - brewed, daily, for your convenience, *thankyavery much*, and they were in the Yellow Sea of China when the Super Typhoon Iniki hit and, lo, they were earning those hashmarks down their sleaves once again.

Crossing the Line

Date time group here

Lat/Long

[have to move this section, because Hong Kong liberty is north of the equator]

Sailors were a superstitious lot from the beginnings of time – when the world was still flat and one could still fall off if not considerate - to the seagods of yore..It was from the time that the Phoenicians first put an oar to the waves, and the line was before the USS_____ on Junuar 13, 1973 was the equator – and Thou Shall Not Cross 'The Line' without the ceremony or the seagods could be mad and cause all kinds of mischief: like monkeying with the Radar or the LORAN-C or the Phalanx and Sparrow Missile Test Suspension (they were all qualed up on modern technology) – or, they'd just set an old fashion storm or oil fire aboard the aft galley.

And so even the commanding officers of the ships – with advanced degrees from the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island or the Naval Postgrad School in Monterey, California - would set aside or reschedule air ops, UNREPS and sub chases all to appease those dastardly gods! It was even in the ship's official orders!

On May 9, 1981 [research] the Navigation officer of the *USS Constellation* reported to her skipper that they had steamed to 0 degrees Lattitude 156 degrees longitude otherwise known as the equator, or 'the line', and since _____ times a ceremony a day long, known since ancient times had to be performed – it was superstition and tradition all woven into initiation of times of old of making boys into men and men into sailors and sailors into Shellbacks and thus real men of the Sea. A time of tradition and hazing almost unknown to the civilian world outside of college, and the ones who'd crossed it before – the shellbacks, hazed the pollywogs in a grubby ceremony – a colorful certificate with Poseiden even went into their service jacket and a card for their wallet.

And though Jack had been both aboard a few months now they's always somehow had stayed south of the 'line' on many evolutions just outside the Straits of Luzon, but it lay right between them and their course to the _____ and the Masterchief of the Boat had officially scheduled to occur on that day as the old girl sailed due north.

The Seven were all 'wogs' that day in the berth standing there in anticipation with all his shipmates when the OOD called him to come to the bridge for the official announcement, and now he had to throw on his crackerjack for this brief duty to the

bridge and would have to sprint back to the compartment to throw on his oldest skivvies, dungarees and boondockers that he'd used to chip and paint with.

"McCracken, Sir." He said reporting in and looked at the paper the JOOW handed him and smiled, getting the right bearing to make the news and grabbed the mike, dialing up the settings for the fullship 1MC: "Attention *Lay-dies* and Gentlemen of the ship! The present position is now zero degrees latitude, 156 degrees longitude; otherwise known by the ancient seafarers as 'the line'. To appease the Seagods, Let the ancient ceremonies commence!!" And he heard a cry stemming from bow to stern as the Ship shuddered and readied herself for '*The Crossing of the Line'.*

"I've gotta go sir!"

"Go wog!" hazed the Lieutenant shot him like a pistol with cleanser bottle right in his face him and the five petty officers on the bridge, howling, threw the red and soaking wadded weather facsimile charts and trash at him and he ducked and sprinted out the hatch but he was really well known from the fight in town and had told too many he was a wog, and he came to the main passageway: "Oh, Shit!" "There's McCracken, he's a virgin, go grab him!" and a gang of ten Boatswains Mates Shellbacks had grabbed him, manhandling him from behind. "Not on my crackerjack!" he screamed at them trying to twist away, but they mobbed him to go out on the outside and down a few ladders and there they poured a full swab bucket of bilge water on his head, and they grabbed him, wildly laughing, blinded by the water and almost slid him down a few ladders where he found himself in the main hangerbay, lining up by the thousands to get initiated once and for all, completely soaking in oily water and the entire bay was laughing at him as they slid him on in.

Through the oil, he got up desparately look for his friends, and they were looking for him too and found him. "There he is!" Tommy came and grabbing his arm dragged him, slippery over to their place in the long winding queue of Pollywogs.

"Oh, man, they got your best uniform!" he said to Jack, but he was laughing hard at his friend's new oily look.

Tommy pulled Jack's ruined jumper over his friend's head and neckerchief and some tall Shellback now standing behind Jack screaming in his ear to put back on the oily neckerchief. "There, wuss, now you look really *cute*!"

"Ugh!"

"Put on the jockstrap, McCracken!" someone was screaming and he looked over to find a detail of twenty sailors striding boisterously over to them, from his old section surrounding him screeming at him and laughing. They had several large garbage bags of 'tricks' with them. And behind all that fuss was Chief

Summerstreet folding his arms and laughing with a crony of twenty chiefs as hard as he could against the bulkhead.

He reluctantly stepped into the jockstrap for them. They roared with laughter.

"It'll make you look bigger, asshole!"

"Now hold hands with your boyfriend!"

He held Tommy's hand. Someone was taking pictures: "Baawtch!!!! Poooooof!" Blinding light, and more and more howls of laughter throughout the immense hanger bay.

"Feeling good now, Jay-yack!" someone was saying. "Jack and his seven dwarves, eh!"

"We're making a special project of you all today!"

Jack and The Seven all looked up at once. "Yeah, that's right, guilt by association!" screamed Chief Summerstreet and all his crony petty officers surrounding him laughed! "You're going to get extra special attention today ladies!! Make 'em all hold hands!"

"It's going to be a long day!" Laramie told Tommy.

"Long, McCracken, I'll show you long!" someone was bumping Jack's knees from behind and he fell to the deck on his hands and knees. "Look, Malloy, he's gotten down to blow you!" a RMSN shellback was screaming.

And they had plastic signs shoved at them to wear: "Jackqueline is my girlfriend." "I love *Seaman* Jack McCracken!" And so on. "Don't let us catch you out of uniform for one second!!" by now, bits of food and mire were hanging from all of their sopping heads. But they looked up to each other in relief, laughing after each new round of incoming pranks and thus made the journey together.

Next they were ordered to were heels and lingerie – who was the devil who thought of stowing that gear on board last port-of-call? Jack somehow lost the jockstrap And lingerie which ripped and did not fit most of them, except for Tommy, whom they hazed for being 'girl-like' small and one of the was chiding Tommy, who's eyes grew wide. 'Just Chill, Malloy, just chill. It's just one day, Tommy."

The MARDET - the detachment of Marines - pollywogs were now being hazed on the other side of the hangerbay and they were going through it chanting "Semper Fi!" and "Hu-Rah" together at every turn. And midshipmen and newborn baby Ensigns and other wog officers were being hazed by a group of seaman, firemen and airmen Shellbacks who took extra joy to haze the young officer-kids before them by spraying them with firehoses, deliberately rigged to soap them up all good.

"You need some c-leaning up, kids! Welcome to The Nav!"

And the Sea, herself capriciously getting into the act, began to set looses a wavetrain of seaswells at them, befitting for the crossing of some demarcation within her soulful self; making the wogs fell over each other as she swayed them back and forth into the pit of mire.

And so on, Jack and his friends made the age old procession through the queue – they low crawled together through the reeking food pit. Next 'station' took them to the biggest bellied chief onboard whose belly was swathed in cooking grease and each wog knelt before him rubbed their face in the green tatooed blubber.

"Hey, Little Malloy, you're not supposed to like this part!" Someone was screeming at Tommy, who didn't rub his face enthusiastically enough for the crowd of Shellbacks all about and who was getting just a little sore about it and the word 'little' always made him want to swing at just any dude.

"Hey, Tommy, remember Molly." Jack whispered when Tommy got back in line. "Just another day at the office." He said and his smile was catching. "Beats fast food, Tommy." Jack said gripping his upperarm for emphasis, reminding him of the poverty he had once faced in Ohio.

"Yeah… Tommy laughed reluctantly at first and them into genuine mirth. "It sure beats working at McDonalds!" He said convincingly, for Tommy had done two years in fast food joint already, before joining the Nav.

"It sure does." And then they all laughed together, and then they were shaking in mirth in line.

At the next station, a pack of aircrewmen grabbed Jack "Oh! Sheeee-yit!!!!" he yelled to the Seven as they mobbed and grabbed him backwards and dragged him away with several other contestants for a 'beauty contest' And they given outlandish cocktail dresses to wear. He could hear Tommy shouting above the racous crowd: "Remember Micky-Deees, Jack, Micky Dees!"

After his big fight in the P.I. he was imfamous throughout the ship and the crowd dually roared the loudest when the announcer said a 'Now fellow shipmates and shellbacks, give it up, guys, for the lovely Miss—-West--Virginny!!! Seaman—-Jack--McCracken!!"

Jack had to then wobble up to the stage to the King _____. Jack was elected "Wog Queen" of the day – to his former chief's delight. Of course they all took tons of pictures and would make it all into this year's cruisebook – Chief would make sure of that! They gave him some plastic flowers and he looked down at his gang Tommy and all – they were all deeply red in the face and laughing as hard as they could, holding their stomach and could barely standup. And everyone was whistling at him and grabbing his butt. He was forced to slowdance with the biggest,

fattest Boatswains Mate – BM1 Hinton, from Engineering - and they played some soapy, weepy Donna Summer song that Jack wobbled through in the heels. He laughed sarcastically at all this, shaking his head, trying to take the hazing it in sort of reluctant good nature which the ship's entire company loved. And he found himself reluctantly laughing unbelievingly at all this foist upon him; it seemed he was always being thrust centerstage of the ship again and again!

And across the bay he saw the ugly, beady eyes of Chief Summerstreet in the crowd watching him in crafty delight and when the music stopped Jack gathered up some sort of strange military bearing, dressed as he was in this get-up, he strutted forwards on the platform, boldly grabbing the mike from the Ens Smith and pointing to him with his fairy scepter across the throng "Are you happy now Chief Summerstreet!!??"

"Affirmative, Cheater!"

And the ship roared back in delight!

And so on and on it went this strange and regal procession of manhood, and they were hazed in Royal fashion and at the end hours later, dripping in mire, they stood at attention when someone bullhorned "A-tten – tion on Deck!" and the Skipper of the Ship came in and announced that they had now become Shellbacks as in times of old, and thus real men of the Sea.

Then they'd be in the shower before long, and laughing and joking about it and for days.

"AH! That was one of the funniest days of my life!" Tommy was telling him next stall over in the shower still laughing to himself in the lush comradeship.

"It certainly was the weirdest!" he laughed soaping up a lather deeply, scrubbing fiercely at all the makeup and mire.

"You were right about one thing Jack."

"Yeah?"

"Tradition and Superstition – they are not dead in The Nav!"

"Told'ya so…"

"I'll never forget you dancing with that BM1 Hinton, never, for the rest of my life!"

"I think I won't either!"

And Jack kept all the signs and posted them all around his friends' racks in his old section's compartment, technically gear adrift, but, for a short while, a sign of their fidelity and comradeship churned up that age old day of Crossing the Line.

The Great Subchase

Jack's time was an era when the US Navy dominated all the world's seas after WWII and the thousand ship Navy. Dwindling down President Reagan would later beef it back up to the '600 ship Navy' and it was a time for the sub searching lore of the chase of the Dolphin Frocked ones, of the Deepest regions that a sailor could sail.

And it was a time of those fine reigning ladies - *The Constellation, The Kitty Hawk, The Enterprise, The Intrepid, The Yorktown, Saratoga, Tarawa, Kearsage… Ah, their names and their histories roll off your tongue like poetry, sung of the great ladies of gray who fought and reigned these for fifty years and more, after the great World Wars…*

And of the tens of thousands of sailors within them who'd cut their teeth on clamshells in the South Seas, or on San Miguel beers, Baloot, Kimchee, Suishi, Soju, and hove-to typhoons in the Yellow Sea, and pounded by Siberian Lows off the Aleutian Archipeligo. Ah… 'scuse me, I was bemused by the poetry of the submarine hunting lore.

And soon after Jack had enlisted the demise of Vietnam Conflict had happened that they had acquired this newer, more technically complex mission now – ASW – Antisubmarine Warfare. They started putting nuclear warheads on those subs, young ones - on ballistic missiles that could knock down a nation half a world away! And, alas, the end of the world loomed, once again.

So they were ever on the hunt -- like Ahab's quest for Moby Dick-- for the deep black subs who gave the era a new purpose - ASW - *the new chase, for our seafaring race.* Deployed cruises, P-3 Orions ever on the prowl dropped their sonobouys in sublurks, the Oceanogs lined the Ocean Floor, and strategic gaps with listening lines – called SOSUS; and high tech fingers of SONAR – were ever pinging away - 'twas a very hot cold war that spanned the seven seas, even eyes from far above satellites' gaze, the high tech mariner in the skies 'gainst the malevolent silent Soviets deep in the abyssal plains.

And today, they were hard at it again, on the chase, all the bloodhounds with their noses pressed down for the scent of the sonic signwaves beneath. Jack had done lots of his study work by now and was on the bridge taking in all he'd just read about ASW and the Quartermaster's roll in it.

Something was afoot he had had some experience now being on the bridge with the Captain and even the Admiral Morrison, when

the tension of the chase had shown in the lines of the face of his skipper and the birds were flying today hard and heavy as the ship shot-put them into the sky all day long.

He went in the CIC right before releaving the watch and checked out all the action from his friends in there because he had obtained a TS – a top secret clearance to do the comm run in San D for a short stint of three months before he had been stationed on the 'Hawk.

Drinking a stiff cup of coffee on the bridge and gazing out to sea he reflected that he'd been kind of lucky getting the TS because of his teenage years in Europe – Bremerhaven, Germany. This was many years back and many oceans back and he had time to reflect as he stood there in the bow breazes whisping his face:

Their flat had been one block from the big port where ships of the Soviet Fleet were repaired in warm water, not ice locked in winter. Ironically the only way Russians had to communicate was English, not German and so he always had contact with them – everyday sometimes. And There were at least thirty leftist clubs under the apartment buildings that lined both sides of the street and he and his mother had lived in one of these for four years while waiting for his father's ship to come in from deployments.

Nearby was also a small US Army Base - Karl Shurz Kaserne - where his mother worked in the PX onbase. Across the wide Weser Military Sealift Port of Nordenham where his old man pulled in a a few times a year. South a half an hour was the Second Armored Division of Garlstadt, Germany, whom his father's ship resupplied.

And they had moved to be near his father, from Norfolk, Virginia because his mother was of the romantic sort and loved being stationed with her husband overseas. And it was because of the public transport system everywhere in Germany that his father agreed to his mother's move overseas. Here, his father reasoned, she would not have to drive *anywhere.*

And Jack had done a lot of partying along this street with her – there was no drinking age limit in Germany. At age fourteen he was already six feet tall, and growing, and did not look his age. And so he hung out with the adults at night and the port kids in the day - and he learned plenty of German and he'd met many a leftist, socialist drinker and he had a German girl friend, almost his mother's age, whom he met every day in the Seaman's Club.

He'd even done a three month cruise on a Polish three masted sailing ship, but he knew his heart, that he would never betray his country, though the Navy didn't know about any of

these Warsaw Pact contacts, he kept his secrets carefully to himself about his many years in Europe and now, thanks to his secrecy, he was in the game good.

Back to the Pacific, the stealth game was on again today! They were off the coast of _____ today. He sensed the enemy everywhere these days and even more so than his numerous buddies because he'd taken a peak in the CIC once during a sortie and, by gosh, Soviet Subs were up and down the Western Coast even in some inlets of the US -- and – they had nuclear weapons! God! The Game was hot! It was a real game, folks, not tainted with lore! I tell ye! For I too once saw it, hot.

And having seen all the real strategic action, he was far more into the experience of the chase than his old buddies living out there days far below the flight deck in a hazegray prison, days without light and and their whole lives contained within the metal skin of the ship. Thus, he received favorable marks during these times for his excellent performance on watch. He was even 4.0 in some areas now in the rating system and for once his chief's were happy with him. He was thrilled to be so high in the game and thrilled to be on the hunt in the game. He winced when he was teased for being the Wog Queen, for he loved this and he swore to himself that he would never let his performance slip again, nor would he fight, for he liked being squared away, professional, 'REGNAV' sailor. Simple as that.

"I miss you Jack." Tommy had told him one day catching up to him along the main passageway, hurdling the 'knee knockers' or, water tight hatches like an Olympic track hurdler all the way to the main ladder.

He stopped in a recess under the ladder and looked around anxiously -- these weren't words young men often told each other especially there and he was acutely uncomfortable though he understood why – the guy appeared not to be adjusting well to Jack's transfer to the OA division.

"You don't stop by anymore to the old section." He wined.

"I know, Tommy, but what can I do, they have every second of my day already blocked out for me." He told him. His new duty now high on the bridge and his new diggings with the QMs basically seemed almost designed to cut off his old friendships with 'The Seven' – though only ten levels down and thirty frames over, they seemed miles apart, for there was so little time even to chow or to sleep.

"I'm just missing my girl."

“I know. Come on, walk as we talk, I gotta get in line for some chow.” Jack told him, he hadta get, lines were long for chow at lunch.

“Okay.”

They fell in behind some Radiomen “…And?” he said turning around to Tommy.

“Well, it’s her birthday today.”

“Oh, cool, how old?”

Tommy now smiled shyly and it was excruciating to Jack to have to placate him so much, but the kid had seemed so low earlier. “Ah, today she is five.”

Several 1mc announcements blocked conversation and then they were in line for chow getting their food and sitting down.”

“It’s Mugwumps again, Jack.” QM3 Maguire was exclaiming the virtues of the stew at the table and other guys from his section were joking around loudly, but he focused on Tommy.

Tommy was digging in his pockets. “Got a letter today and a picture.” He held them across the table to Jack and for all to see.

“That’s them, my girls, Molly and Flo.” He cooed.

“Cool.” He said glancing at the photo. “Feel any better?”

“Yeah.” The kid said with that shy, annoying smile and Jack hit his chow with the focus of a watchstander at night.

Finally the kid finished his chow and said getting up “Stop by my rack sometimes Jack and shoot the breaze. I miss you.”

Jack’s blood pressure shot up off the charts. “Sure, Tommy.” He managed with some difficulty to say kindly. And finally Tommy left for watch.

And Maguire mocked in falsetto voice “I sure do miss you Jacqueline, come by my bunk too-night sweetie.”

“Shut-up Maguire, he’s just going through some hard times.” He said emphatically pointing to him with a fork in his hand.

“Oh, I thought for a second he was going to kiss you night-night.”

“Just shut-up!” He leveled his head for a no-nonsense look and for a split second he had a cold aqua stare about his eyes that flashed before he put a fist right through a guy’s soul.

“Alright, alright…”

A few days later once ASW Ops calmed down a bit Jack went to the navigation office near the bridge, and though he almost always loved to ‘shoot the breaze’, today he really wanted to bust some more butt and get through his QM3&2 course work since it was a ‘quiet day’ of no air ops and he cherished the space and peace to get things done, but Tommy came in, finding his little cubbyhole in the vast ship somehow.

"Tommy, I don't wanna be rude, but, I'm trying to get some poop done here." He said looking up from the manuel, coffee cup firmly in the other hand.

"But you never come by any more Jack."

"Dude, there's like some five thousand other guys on this ship to make friends with!"

Tommy winced at his rebuke "I – I'm not very friendly, Jack."

"You're going to have to learn to be - *this is the Navy."* Jack winced as he heard himself say his very own father's hatelful words. Whut! Was this guy his charge, now - his brother's keeper!

"Look, I'm trying Jack. I'm not doing too well."

"Well, why don't you try to strike for a rating then, and make a career in the Navy and get these guys off your mind."

"Yeah, I was thinking about that."

"Good, well, what are you interested in, Tommy." He said trying to relax a little bit.

"I was thinking of QM."

Jack's stomach sunk – he could even physically feel it drop in altitude for he knew Tommy wasn't interested in the QM rating like he was – with all the subchases and sorties of the fleet, for when he'd told Tommy about them his eyes would glass over. He was just clingy as can be and it was annoying jack to no end!

"I thought you liked HN – Hospital Corpsman."

"The rating's overmanned."

"So, if it's what you really love, you should do it."

"I don't love it all that much."

"What about MS – Mess Management."

"No, don't like it a bit."

"What do you like?"

"History."

"Sheee-yit!! That's not a rating in the Navy!"

"I know." He sighed.

"Aerographer's Mate – a 'weather guesser'."

"Can't strike for it."

"Are you so sure?"

"My ASVAB scores were too low for it anyway."

"Tommy, go see the Career Counselor, will you?"

"Okay." And he went away dejected.

Now he couldn't get the kid out of his head, nor could he study anymore with all that on his plate and after a talk to some of his new buddies on the bridge about it, they suggested that he get him a kind of sponsor to watch out after the kid and Jack went to a guy in Tommy's compartment he'd known for a

while, a gregarious and magnimous black sailor – Daryl James,Junior, by the nickname of 'DJ' and asked him to take him under his wings some and help him. To Jack's great relief, that did the trick and the two were going on liberty together with their section and a big burden came off Jack's shoulders and let him concentrate on his job and getting ahead for once in the Navy.

Place for anecdotes etc here

*INSERT some ASW Ops

"Oh, he's a neat kid." DJ was telling him a few months later at chow. "Likes to party and chase skirts. Typical sailor…" he laughed heartily and was telling of some of their escapedes and antics and clubs that they'd hit together with their section and some of the Asian girls they'd slammed into out on the prowl in port.

After a few minutes DJ noticed that Jack was quiet. "What's wrong Jack."

"He's married, DJ." He unloaded at last.

"What!"

"Didn't you know, DJ?"

"He never told me *anything!*"

"And I'm good friends with his wife and daughter."

"Dang!"

DJ was furious and so Jack said "Oh, well, guess he needed some relief, you know."

"I guess…" he said sarcastically and dug in quietly on his chow.

Jack joked some more, but he had a feeling he had just doomed Tommy's friendship with DJ, somehow. Couldn't he accept that Tommy, was, well, slightly gone?

"Look, DJ, he's trying to fit in, that's all, okay?"

"Well, he doesn't have to cheat on her to do that."

"Please, DJ, just watch out after him, will ya?"

He sighed. "I'll try."

*INSERT Yokusuka/Hong Kong or Singapore Liberty

A liberty where Tommy follows Jack around too much, too clingy and Jack starts getting tense. And there's a scene where **Jack and his buddies shame tommy and then desert him and he runs after them in the port of Yukusuka and Tommy** ends up cheating with an 'lowly' African whore who kind-heartedly brings him back to the ship and he hallucinates that he's contracted an incurable disease – which he tells Jack about.

[This is a stronger story arc – for if Tommy really has lost his family – for once FLo finds out he has Herpes or AIDs he will be thrown out. Jack can't tell if he's telling the truth or if it's a hallucintation but Jack feels responsible for not watching out for Tommy because someone sniggered that they were gay. He caved into the pressure of the group, and Tommy ends up dead because he's not strong enough to take responsibility for his cheating and loosing his family, though Jack carefully says, "If you really have lost them, Tommy, then the time to let them go is now – ahead of the wave. Let them go, Tommy." He replies – as if he could have let her go – going mad "I can't – I can't! his hands to head. Jack says "Mourn them, Tommy, the pain will go away with time!" "I can't its too much!!"

They go on station and Tommy is messing up left and right on his job, getting in big trouble and then they go to liberty and he snaps and dies.

Jack worried about Tommy

Months went by like this. They hit heavy seas off _____ and then they were bound for Japan.

His old section had the liberty first and the QM section was doing their turn at painting the bridge while in port, when he saw his old pal Tommy coming up to him again.

"Hey there you are Tommy!" And they shook hands in Sailor shake. "How's it going? Haven't seen you much."

"Alright." He answered.

"How's DJ, dude?"

"Umm, he's okay, I think."

"Where is he?"

"Oh, he got transferred yesterday off the ship."

"Oh, sorry to hear that. I didn't know."

"Why did you tell him that I'm married Jack? He started right on in. The pressure hit jack straight like a Tsunami.

"Tommy I was worried for you. I told him to watch out after you."

Tommy grimaced.

"Well, now look, you've had a good time with him, and he's gone now, so who cares what he thinks."

"Awh, it wasn't the same without you Jack."

He looked at Tommy as if he were on drugs.

Tommy answered his questioning glance. "Look, Jack, those I hung out with were DJ's friends not mine."

"So…?"

"I mean I don't have anything in common with them."

"It doesn't matter. You just go to the clubs with them, not have book club meetings and hold hands." He teased now prepping the hazegray paint for stirring and prying the lid with his boatswain's knife.

"I mean, I mean I feel funny around them now that DJ's gone."

"Funny?" he was distracted with finding the stirring tongs.

"Like I'm just some dork, I dunno, I just don't feel …"

"That's all in your head, dude. After your first beer you won't feel different at all. It'll relax you some."

"I know, but, well they didn't even ask me to go with them this time."

"They didn't?" *Oh no, not this again*! "But, shoot, you should have at least enjoyed some liberty out there – and had a drink for me."

"Well, I had a few drinks." Tommy said lowly.

"Cool." He was back at the bulkhead again, concentrating,

"I was trying to stop" he told him, his voice very tight. "Before I got too far."

"Yeah I know." He was dipping the brush now.

"Shit tonight I did this Filipina right in the club's head…"

"Wow!" Jack looked over stunned - Tommy was a man afterall!

"Sometimes I well, I get too drunk and I don't wanta do things like that, you know…"

"Uh-huh…" still watching.

"Yeah, of course."

"So, I want my buddies you know, around me, you know, when I'm kind of plastered – you know, to stop me, kinda… like you and The Seven used to do."

"Well you could find some other guys Tommy, I won't get upset cuz I can't go."

"Well, you're my best friend, Jack."

"Well…"

"So, I'm just gonna fart around here until you get off duty and then we'll go together."

"Tommy you shouldn't wait for me, cuz who knows when I'll be done."

"I know, but it's awfull going alone. I can't stand it."

"So, go with someone else."

"I have no one else."

"Awe, come on, there's lots of bookish guys like yourself." He did a double take when he saw the hurt look on Tommy's face.

"Do I look so bookish?"

"Yeah - and what of it!"

"Right." Tommy said, trying to agree to the principal, who cared if he loved books? Right. But something else was wrong. He felt that they could see right through him and that no body liked him – except Jack and DJ. He was gittery and he didn't know why. He was failing…..

"You just gotta be more friendly that's all."

The kid looked down at the deck. "I'm trying but I'm having an awful hard time at it." His throat was getting tight, he seemed like he was loosing it, somewhat.

He turned around from the bulkhead took his gloves off and put them on Tommy's shoulders. "Look Tommy, you're just not used to this place yet. Just keep on trying and you'll eventually adjust to it." *More of Dad's old lines*.

"How do you do it so easily?" Tommy's glasses were fogging up and his face was turning red now and Jack was getting scared.

"Shit, my old man was a Chief in the Navy."

"So no wonder you're so well adjusted to it." Tommy said sighing, wondering if things were ever going to be okay.

"Used to beat the hell out of me if I messed up like this." He laughed at himself. "And so I have a problem with male authority figures sometimes." He was trying to be light hearted about himself and thus cheer Tommy up some.

"Hey, and your Dad?" Jack asked turning around. "What did he do?"

"I never knew him."

"Really?"

"I was a foster child until I turned 17 and met Flo down the street."

"And your Mother?"

"Died when I was eight."

"Jeez, any brothers or sisters? Aunts, uncles?"

"None."

He sensed a cavernous loneliness standing before him. Tommy began to sob quietly "All I have in the world is my wife, my kid - and you. Oh God, Jack, I cheated on them tonight, *again*!"

Oh boy… he cringed and felt the heaviness of a sea anchor now dragging behind him.

Now they were going back to Subic Bay and Jack had been double-timing for at least a month now keeping an eye on Tommy while trying to do his own watch. Tommy had become possessive and demanding at times to Jack, then give him that sweet shy smile when he got his way, a smile that made Jack mad enough to punch holes in drywall bulkheads if there'd been any on board. But inside he was really worried and tried ignoring all the pressure he felt.

But when the kid didn't receive a care-packet and letter and couldn't reach his wife on the phone for three days, he was convinced somehow that his wife knew the truth of his infidelity. And he was just about to loose it again.

He urged him to go to the Chaplain. "I sinned viciously against her." Is all he would say to that, shaking his head over and over. He was now getting in trouble on watch and he seemed like he thought his chief was after him. Paranoia immenated from all around him and for once Jack thought maybe he was getting mentally ill. Jack spent long time at his rack reassuring Tommy that Flo couldn't possibly know.

"DJ told them." He insisted. He seemed like he was going crazy.

"Now why in the hell would he do a thing like that!!"

"Cuz he hated me for cheating on my wife. Why did you tell him that I am married!!"

"Yeah, and so what! DJ's still not the type to rat! He's cool, Tommy!"

"You told on me Jack!" he cried.

"Cuz I wanted him to help you, Tommy!"

"The stakes are too high Jack, I can't risk loosing them."

Jack was getting desparate – he didn't dare tell Tommy's chief because they'd then can the kid on a Psyche discharge. He knew then where all this was heading – down, down hill for poor Tommy if he couldn't support his beloved wife and child. He prayed that his vigil would help him and that Tommy'd snap out of it soon.

He missed the old Tommy – what had happened to him? Or, strangely to think, he had never known him after all – that this looser was the real Tommy, afterall.

Finally he had a positive idea: "Look Tommy let's do liberty together – we finally have the same schedule. I know where a bonfire is on the beach in Subic Bay."

"Oh, great." And the kid was finally smiling that so sweet smile again.

The Bonfire

Subic Bay, 1970

And so they arrived on the beach in a rental car with their section and Tommy was right by his side – as always. They piled on the drinks and things were sliding smoothly down in the night on the beach. Some local girls were there and they were all very lit in the night. The fire flickered and cracked and they drank San Miguels and Red Horses under the swaying palms.

More

"I'm just curious." Some Boatswain Mate he recognized from somewhere on deck took him aside carefully "Are you two more than just friends?"

"Who?"

"You and Malloy."

Jack just staired at him furious. About ten guys were now gathering around him, like gay-bashers about to give a 'shower party' in the head and Jack was instantly alarmed. "What!"

"We just wanted to tell you Jack, all kinds of scuttlebutt all over the ship is going down about you and Tommy Malloy."

"No way!" he paced around insanely furious and he blood boiling with the drink. "The kid is just lost and I am just trying to help him!!"

"Everyone is saying Malloy ain't normal." Another said.

"He used to be!!" Jack said, remembering vividly his pleasant five day pass spent mostly at Tommy and Flos quarters in San Diego.

"Some guys can't take it out here for very long."

Slow down Jack…be careful the voice was telling him… but he was way beyond reasonable actions now and he pushed a punk named Cooper right out of his way roughly.

"Hey! Prick!" Cooper called after him and followed right behind him while screamming at him, but he strode away fast he was so angry. And he grabbed Tommy from the bonfire nearby

"Tommy do you hear what those guys over there are saying about us!!" and he pointed to a large gang of guys twenty feet away Cooper leading them and mobbing their way towards them.

"No." Tommy said looking over at them his eyes growing wide.

"They're all saying we're lovers!"

"Whose saying this?"

"Them and probably the entire ship!!"

A knife went through Tommy's heart in terror and shock turning to horror. And they were around them now

"Why would they say that?" he was saying, his eyes were watery and terrorized.

"Cuz you're acting too clingy to me all the time!!"

"I am?!" he cried. "*I am?!*"

And now Tommy openly wept in front of them all. "I'm going down, Jack!" he cried. "Oh God! I'm going down!"
And now they had gathered all around them, the guys, and the agony of Tommy's shame terrorized Jack. He tried to coax him out of it:

"Tommy you just need to get a bit more independent! It's really hurting my rep to help you so much!"

"Cry Baby!' someone said with contempt to Tommy.

"Shut up!" Jack roared fists clinching.

Oh God, and now Tommy was hunched over weeping now in front of them all!! He had completely lost all of his dignity. He was very drunk. He had completely lost it all!

"They're having a lover's spat." Someone joked loudly nearby and Tommy bolted away wildly down the dark beach towards their rental car.

"Wait, Tommy!" Jack chased him down the beach.

"Get away from me! I hate you!" he screamed. "I'm not queer!"

"Now wait a minute! Don't drive off like this Tommy! You're too drunk!"

"What the hell do you care!!"

"I do care, Tommy!"

"Stay away from me you fuckin' faggot!!!" and he was running again.

"Tommy!"

"There ain't nothing left of me!" he called out to the night.

Jack grabbed his arm – and someone was taunting: "Lov-ver Bo-woys!"

And Tommy socked Jack in the jaw and before he knew it he'd spun all the way around and swiped off the pair of glasses of Tommy's face.

"Oh shit!" he said standing there getting his first bearings of sobriety for once and realizing what he had just done when he realized that Tommy had bounded off for the driver's seat rented car. And he ran behind him to the passengers side and frantically got in as Tommy swept off.

"Tommy, slow down!"

"Get out!" He said slamming the car to a stop and Jack hit the windshield hard with his forehead. A long crack appeared before them soaked with blood.

"Owh!" he had blood dripping down his face and he sat stunned for a minute as the car bolted away.

“Get -- out!!!!” Tommy cried and Jack woke up.

“No way! I’m not letting you drive away like this!” he said as blood was dripping down his face.

“Fine! Enjoy the ride then, asshole!”

Along the wild moonlit road they bounced.

“Tommy slow down!” he screamed as he frantically buckled himself in the broncing car.

“Tommy! Slow down, you need your glasses!”

“Thanks a lot pal!” he threw his broken pair at Jack.

“Gees, let’s just slow down and talk about this!”

“To hell with you!” And he kept going, down a darkened jungle road by the bay, bouncing and rolling off turns barely

“Tommy!” he screamed seeing the luminescent moon-lit bay suddenly by their side again.

He grabbed the wheel from Tommy “Are you mad!” he cried.

And he yanked the emergency brake.

And the next turn was too sharp and they flipped off the edge and into the bay.

The spray of the water blew Jack away, forced into his nose, he heard the thud of glass shattering and the skip of the car in the water but somehow up and once it had all stopped he wildly untangled himself out of the car and swam to the driver’s side.

Tommy was outside of the car – he had crashed right through the windshield and he lay on top of the partly submerged hood.

“Oh my God!” he cried “Tommy!”

He looked all twisted and wrecked. He reached over to take him off the hood and carry back to the beach.

Tommy moaned when Jack grabbed him. And jack felt his broken ribs poking threw his skin as he held him and slimy warm blood was pouring out from him in gobs. “It’s no use, Jack.”

“What!”

“I’m done down here.”

“What!” he screamed.

“Down here on earth.” He said. Tommy was looking up at the moon and at bit of peace was on his face, blood trickled down the corner of his mouth. “I can’t feel anything at all, Jack.” He smiled and seemed almost proud of it.

“Tommy, wait. Let me get a doctor…”

“No, just stay here a moment with me Jack. If you don’t mind any.”

“No let me get a doctor!”

“Don’t leave me to die alone Jack!” he cried. “Oh God, Jack don’t let me die alone!”

“Oh no! Don’t say that Tommy! Don’t say that!” he screamed.

"It's okay Jack! I'm at peace with it now. I just want some company," he smiled. "You know what, the madness is gone, Jack."

"Please let me try to save you!"

"Shoot, I was getting quite mad, Jack."

"Oh, God, Tommy! I thought it might be so, but I just wanted to help you."

"I know, Jack, but, look, it's too late now, Jack. Just stay with me – I beg of you, Jack." He sobbed. "I beg of you!!"

"Okay, Tommy." And Tommy relaxed in his arms, Jack could feel it and in a few seconds incredibly Tommy began to smile more into the light of the moon.

"Oh my God! I just wanted to help you – not fight with you, Tommy."

"Oh well, friends will have spats, sometimes, ya know."

He was crying now very bitterly cradling his friend.

Tommy smiled. "Jack, you know something?"

"What!"

"You're my best friend."

"Don't talk like that!"

"I just wanted you to know that. And, I'm so glad you're here for my last – you know."

"No!" he cried.

"I'm sorry I was mad at you Jack."

"No, don't be sorry, Tommy!" And he began to shake while holding his friend in the water. "It is I who should be sorry!"

"Don't cry Jack. I'm fine now." His eyes shown with the brilliance of the moon upon him, and he smiled into its glory. "I'm just fine now. I'm going home."

"What!"

"You tell Flo I was thinking of her when I d…?"

"Yes, of course. Oh God!"

Tommy was getting weak and fading away. But he was still smiling.

"Ya mind looking after my Molly for me, sometimes Jack?"

"Not at all, but look don't talk like that!"

"Are you my best friend or not?"

"Of course."

"Then promise me you'll look out after my little girl, Jack!" He whispered urgently.

"Yes, of course. I promise."

"Oh God! What have I done?"

"Well, it's all over now Jack."

"Say it's not so, Tommy!" He cried.

"Well, yeah it is Jack, look, Jack I'm afraid I've got to go now. I have an appointment and I don't want to be UA for it, ya know."

"Tommy!"

And he rolled back into Jack's arms, shutting his eyes, still smiling at the little joke he'd made -- his very last words.

He was very still now in Jack's arms and his broken body was limp. A dense fog surrounding the rest: that he had carried Tommy, while weeping, a hundred yards to the beach, where he gently lain him in the soft wet sand. His friends running out to him and their cries; then the sirens of the shore patrol; and lights and [Philipino need name] police. and covered Tommy him with a sheet. Then somehow he was blowing the breathalyzer, the unnecessary handcuffs, for all to see. Though it was hot, he shivered and they dilated his eyes and he could not talk and they strapped him onto a gurney.

"He's in some kind of shock." An MA said around him, probing his head which was banged up. "He's got a slight concussion."

After an ordeal all night at the big bright ER they put him in the brig because he looked bad enough they worried he'd hurt himself, or worse..

And he had not moved off the cot to eat or drink for two days. He was soaked in blood and mud and wouldn't take a shower, nor would respond to visitor requests to come back to see him. Two NIS investigators came and questioned him, but he responded in a daze.

In his head repeated endlessly the crash, the thud of Tommy's body flying through the front window, the spray of water… most of all the single most damning thing was the glasses flying off Tommy's face, when he had punched him… over and over and over again they flew off. If he could have seen the bend, but for the glasses.. off they flew again and again.

How could he have taken advantage of someone of less… of less what? Less caliber? Less status? Less popularity? How could he have done such a thing? Tommy had pleaded with him to help him to stop drinking! He clinched his fists there on the cot in the dank brig he actually prayed: 'If somehow I get through this and stay in the Navy, I'm never gonna be like that again, I swear it. I promise you God, I will help others just Please help me to stay in – for I've got nowhere else to go now."

Over and over and over, Tommy's last words 'You know something, Jack? You're my best friend." "You're my best friend, still my best friend, still, still…best friend…best friend…still…still. Tommy's dying mercy was almost as painful as his loss, for, to Jack, it was all about honor of which he

clearly saw that he had none! No honor to take with him to his own beyond! None! Cardboard!

He turned wildly in his rack trying to sleep off despair, trying to quell the urges to drink heavily this off.

The glasses flew off, over and over off his face. Was he not meant to fight for the weaker versus against them? His mother, drunk as she was, had tried to teach him that.

A deeper, darker tragedy slithered through him, and made him crave a drink, to drink deeper and deeper than ever before – when *the other* had died and he had drunk to no end and his father had found him, saying "*You're nothing but a drunk, Jack*."

Both of them gone because of him, not just one but two people gone out of this world, and he deserved no less of a sentence. Shame flushed his face. He had not personally tried to kill them, of course, but his lack of honor had finished them off nevertheless! And, oh, another?! Oh, God, Another! I have nothing. I can do nothing. I am nothing. How can I go on?

Finally some MA called a psychiatrist and on a whim called the base chaplain.

He didn't even get up for the doctor until an MA ordered him to. And there he was probed and asked embarrassing questions like: "Do you want to kill yourself?"

"No."

"Seaman McCracken, you're not acting like you want to live."

"Hmmph."

"Do you want to hurt yourself?"

"No."

"Do you hear voices."

"Yeah."

"Oh?" Ah! A luny!

"Yours and mine."

"Do you hear any voices inside your head, Seaman McCracken?"

"No."

"No?"

"No -- sir."

"What's ailing you? Why are you not eating?"

"Poor Tommy is dead." He told the floor.

"Yes, I know about it and it is very terrible thing, but…

And the doctor went on an on… Jack heard none of it, just that his friend was lost out there in the eternal night and the horrors were upon his soul. The glasses…over and over. Maybe he was going mad, oh the damned glasses.

Chaplain Adams

The next day the Chaplain Adams came. It was morning and bright and he let himself in the cell quietly, not ordering the kid before him even to get up, though, his rank was a commander, he was certainly entitled to some tiniest military respect.

The kid was still covered with blood and mud from an accident that had happened over two days ago.

"Hi there Jack." He sat down on the bench across from him.

Jack opened his eyes. He'd finally fallen asleep after two straight days of hell on earth.

The man was in khaki uniform with brass crosses on his lapels and with a warm smile. Jack had trouble focusing on him, as he doubled himself at times and it was almost a comic sight if he hadn't been on the edge of the world – again.

"Well, Jack, I know what happened. And I'm here to help you any way I can – to get through this. I'm Chaplain Adams."

How could any man help him? He just lay there and stared at the Chaplain from his rack.

"I know it may sound hard, but I believe we can get through this, if, if we go together, okay?"

Jack couldn't say anything.

"Why don't you tell me what's troubling you Jack?"

"What good would that do?" he choked out. He could barely talk. He was too weak to get up.

"Well, I tell you what, everything we say is confidential, so, what do you have to lose?"

"I don't know."

"Good. So tell me Jack."

"Poor Tommy is dead.

"I know Jack."

"He was my best friend once, he needed me!"

"I know."

"My actions caused it."

"Did you hurt him yourself?"

"We had a fight. And he drove drunk because of it."

"How is that your fault?"

"I don't know."

"Don't close up to me with that phrase 'I don't know' because you *do* know Jack, don't you?"

"Yes. I do know."

"Well?"

"I keep seeing the glasses fly off his head over and over and over. It's driving me crazy!"

"I can imagine."

"Oh God!" he covered his face with his dirty, bloody hands and the chaplain saw how he suffered so.

"Why did the glasses fly off, Jack?"

He was too choked up to talk, though his mouth opened.

"This may be the hardest thing you ever have to say." Chaplain said.

Jack nodded.

"So since it being the hardest, it's all downhill from here."

"What?"

Hope?

"When you've been through a typhoon, Jack, does a typical WestPac storm phase you?"

"No, sir."

He leaned over in almost a whisper: "This is your typhoon Jack."

Jack had been through a typhoon recently when he was TAD on the USS_____and the analogy reached deep into his tortured soul.

He opened his mouth with a breath. "I swiped the glasses off – Off poor Tommy's head."

"And?"

"He drove without them."

"And?"

"He drove drunk without his glasses, because of me."

"Why did he drive away Jack?"

"I hurt him badly, with my words!"

And he had bared his soul, but he was so weak that he hadn't told him about the other… "You're nothing but a drunk Jack, nothing but a drunk Jack, nothing…nothing…nothing…" the old man was saying, and had been saying, reverbing all along…

"Jack, have some water to drink will you?"

"No."

Then Chaplain tried another track. "His wife was wanting to talk to you on the phone this morning. She called all the way from San Diego."

"About what?" he said jerking in his rack, suddenly exceedingly afraid.

"Well, Jack I talked to her myself. She heard from your LPO that you feel pretty bad about the accident and she just wanted to tell you that she doesn't blame you at all."

"Well, she should."

"Oh, Jack, do you really think so?"

"Yes, Chaplain. I know so."

"So, let's say it's true and you're at fault. How's that going to help things any? How's that going to help her?"

"I don't know."

"Jack, I *told you* I don't want to hear those words 'I don't know.'" Chap said firmly, asserting his rank.

"Well, how can I possibly help Flo? I can't bring him back from the …

"Doesn't she have a daughter, or something…"

Jack sat up so suddenly that his head spun and he clung to the rack. "Oh! I forgot."

Chaplain saw him sit up. "Forgot what?"

He grabbed his head between his hands, he was starting to get a huge migraine.

"…forgot my promise to him." He had rolled and rolled and rolled in everything that had happened that dark, tortuous night, so how was it that he had forgotten her? His head had been in a fog of shock and doom, and he'd been so very lost in it, as if never before…except, except when *the other* had…. That was another time. He missed his cousin tremendously, suddenly. And then he suddenly wanted a drink most terribly. He was physically shaking for it. If he could have got out of the Navy right now for a drink would he have dranken it?

"A promise? For what?"

"To watch out after his daughter." He heard himself say.

"Okay, good."

"I've got to take care of her now." Jack said dizzily.

"Right."

"How about starting with taking care of yourself first?'

Jack looked down at his hands and nodded.

"Petty Officer Staunton?"

"Yessir!"

"Get this sailor a meal on the double, and get him into the shower immediately afterwards."

"Aye-Aye, Sir!" he cried, smiling in amazement then the MA turned to. 'What a miracle worker the chaplain is!' The MA thought, for they had tried for two days to roust the poor kid! And Chap gets it done in twenty minutes! *There was something here… something very real!* He decided that he would go to mass after work.

The Chaplain stayed with Jack, polite talk making sure Jack had finished every bit of his chow and was escorted out of the cell with a master-at-arms for a shower.

At the threshold Chaplain Adams told him "I'll be back later tonight and tomorrow morning to check on you, Jack."

"Yessir.' He croaked out.

But when the Chaplain Adams came back that evening Jack could not be awoken.

The next day he awoke so happy and he couldn't figure out where he was, until it hit him with the force of a depth charge that his friend was dead and he was in the brig!

Somehow, he had thought that the nightmare was over, but it wasn't. He was just clean now. He would take care of the kid now, but his life was still empty and dark. Then a new fear devastingly went through his stomach. "What am I in the brig for? Have I been charged with this? I guess I no longer have a chance in the Navy. What in the world am I going to do now??" he looked around but in his head he saw a devastating vision – of him laying in the gutters in the port town in Europe.

So when the Chaplain came back, he was still laying down. But at least he sat up when the chaplain came in the brig.

And that was a victory to the chaplain, who banked big on hopes' terms.

"Well, Jack, you look a lot better."

"I'm not."'

"Well, it takes time Jack."

"Whatever."

"Is there anything you want Jack?"

"Well, I'm in the brig, Chap. Am I charged with something?"

"Well, Jack, your chief was worried about your mental health. That's why you're in here. But, I spoke to your skipper and no, they are not going to charge you formerly. But I do think you will go to mast about this."

"I thought so." He gulped – one more mast for his service jacket! His career really was doomed! And then, so was he! Gosh, he was like Tommy!

"Your ship pulled out this morning by the way."

"Oh!" and all his friends were now gone! He stared at the Chaplain hard, his mouth aghast. Even more shock!

"Don't worry, Jack. I got your seabag and stuff for you at my office."

"Your office?"

The chaplain smiled. "Congratulations, Jack, you are looking at you new boss for the next few weeks."

"Sir?"

"Yes, your are TAD with me, for the next few weeks. Your CO ordered you to attend twenty AA meetings and to perform some community service, and to take a detox program."

"Oh." That didn't sound so bad. But he was in shock because none of his friends had even said goodbye! He felt like an outcast, an outcast of the sea!! A sailor fallen from grace from the sea!!

"And when your ship comes back in you'll go to Captain's mast, Jack."

"Okay." He swallowed hard. He'd face that - later. He'd face his friends' betrayal – later. Had the 'Hawk split in a hurry? Why had they not come, not any one of them?

"Why did the 'Hawk leave so fast? Was there an ……."[research term for a rapid deployment in a crisis]

"I don't know Jack."

"My friends didn't say even goodbye."

He swayed as he sat there. How he wanted to die!

The Chaplain watched the young man struggle with this before him, he was devastated. Chap put his hand on Jack's shoulder. Life shook people and here was one - of the many on his daily rounds of tending to folks struck hard by life's knockout blows, daily. Life was wonderful and awful all at once and it was his job to tear that apart and reconstruct it from sailors every darn day! It was no straight forwards task. But he had immense power on his side, for his CO was a mighty one, in the sky!

"Chaplain, No one has told my family about this?"

"No, Jack."

"I, at least, don't want my father to find out, okay?"

"Okay, Jack."

Jack looked around for the first time in the place he was actually in, still not believing any of this.

"And I got you a room in the barracks." Chaplain Adams said.

"Okay." This guy 'Chap' was very neat for an officer.

"Oh, but there's one or two stipulations."

"No drinking." Jack said for him.

"Right. No drinks. No girls. No parties. No pool tables games. Nothing. And No more: 'I--don't--knows' and oh, lots of community service.

"Service? Doing what, sir?"

Chaplain smiled broadly. "You'll see, Jack."

The Orphans of Olangapo

"Suffer not the little children..."

The next Monday morning Jack found himself in the barracks of Navsta waking up to the bugle recording of reveille and not knowing really where he was. Though he'd actually slept deep and long the entire day before, he felt more tired than he had ever been. After shower and chow he reported exactly on time to the chaplain's office, where he sat for an hour in the foyer, trying to thumb through *The Navy Times* while the chaplain was on a long, overseas phonecall. He could not focus on out what the call was all about for even a few seconds at a time. And he was not used to being idle at any point, for having been more than a year on a carrier, he'd been used to being very busy for every second, so the time did not pass easily for him for the deluge of grief physically descended upon him in a wild torrent and sitting there he almost violently he squeezed in his stomach willing himself – doubling up to not feel it. And also in wildly worried frenzy in his stomach – what would he do now if they booted him?

At last Chap was finished and he popped out of his office with a smile on his face. "Good Morning Jack. Nice to see you. How are you today?" he said and he shook Jack's hand.

"Okay, Chap." He said blinking bloodshot eyes.

"Well, good." Chap said, bustling around his office, grabbing his briefcase and his cover. "Well, I hope you're ready for a bit of business, Jack. Got bunches to do today. Hope you can keep up with me." He laughed totally ignoring the wreck of a sailor standing there right before him.

What did chaplains do but sit around their office and write sermons? Jack thought. But as he followed Chap out of the office he did see the Chap was thin and energetic and off they zoomed in the car, before he almost knew it they were going out the gate, saluted by the Marine sentries.

"We're going to Sister Maria's."

"What's that, sir?"

"It's an orphanage down town run by two nuns."

"Oh." Said Jack stunned for it sounded terribly tedious for, he hoped for something to take his mind off of his troubles and the a slow drive out there rattled his nerves, for the daily torrential rains always made a mockery of travel, in and out of ruts they wobbled down the road.

Incredibly the Chaplain turned down to the local district a local bar – one Jack'd been too many times. The owner, Diego Pepe came out the back and warmly greeted Chap, and Chap

responded in fluent Tagalog. He showed him where they could load cases of canned food and diapers into the trunk while and off they sped down the road.

"Most of the kids have American fathers." Chap was saying over his shoulder as he drove, "and they have diseases. It's just terrible. I do what little I can do to help them."

"I thought you just helped sailors and marines." Jack admitted.

"When you see them, you'll see why I fit them in on my off time." He said, smiling brightly looking over to Jack as if he'd found a secret treasure cache.

And they pulled up to a little compound, Chap tooted his horn and a teenage Philipina came and opened and closed the gate behind them. As soon as they parked and got out a loud squeal emitted all around them. And fifteen or so Amerasian kids on the makeshift, tiny playground ran to them screeming for joy. And Jack sighed as he hauled himself out the car. He felt as if he weighed a ton.

Chap was laughing and leaning over to talk to each one in Tagalog and some were pulling at Jack's side and he found himself looking down as a four year old Amerasian girl handed a daisy to him.

Two Catholic sisters came out and greeted them.

"Sister Maria and Sister Imelda, this is Jack. He's going to be helping me out some for a few weeks."

"Oh Great Jack! Welcome." Sister Maria said.

They brought in the supplies from the bar into a tiny little pantry. "Jack it's estimated that by 1990 that there will be some fifty thousand Amerasian children living in the Philipinnes."

"Fifty thousand!"

"Yes."

"That's a lot of one night stands!"

"That's right, Jack. And a big percentage of them are going to be street kids, making their living as prostitutes or rag pickers."

"Oh God!" he thought about the last Filipina – Suki - he'd done near the Sampaguita club and he began to wonder if he'd made any! He couldn't even remember if he'd been sober enough to use a condom!

"These are only the very lucky ones, we can take in, Jack." And he turned to Sister Maria "How's little Jezzy?"

"She sick."

He trailed Chap like a zombie, his feet were heavy as lead, into a little room where the babies were. About fifteen cribs stood in there and tiny little faces peeped out through the bars – bobbing up and down rather drunkenly in their babyish

happiness to see them and Chap picked up one of them greeting her tenderly. '[Baby talk in Tagalog]'

One of them about a year old looked up at him forelornly through the bars, her little hands holding them like the tiniest jailbird he'd ever seen - and the precious little comedy of that suddenly broke his horror-trance – for he'd just been three days behind bars, and he suddenly he found that he had picked her up saying "In the brig, eh? Whatcha in for, *Little Lady*?"

And everybody laughed at this, including Jack, and he suddenly felt very happy as he tickled her chubby little tummy with his nose hearing her gurgly little squeal.

"He's a natural with them." observed Chap as Jack tossed her in the air above him her little bell tied into her hair jingled in the air. His mom had taught him to be good to kids.

"He like kids." One of the sisters exclaimed.

"Most sailors just like making the kids…" Chap said.

She smiled a drunken gurgle at Jack and tried to grab his mustache.

"She seems to be doing better." Said Chap.

"Well, someone visit her." Said the sister pointing to Jack.

She had almond eyes of brown, but her hair was light and feathery and the color of Jack's own and he held her up to his face to talk to her and she gave him the biggest drunken two-toothed smile. "Love ya little lady." He told her.

"What's her story, Chap, what's a cuty doing here?" he asked still cuddling her to his cheeks.

"This is Jezzy, Jack, we don't know her real name because she was left on our doorstep one night." Chap told him.

Jack stopped tossing her and agony gripped his throat again. "Oh, no…"

"She came with a little bell tied into her hair – one of the Air Force dependants nicknamed her 'Jezebelle' – not a very nice character y'know, so she's been 'Jezzy' ever since."

"How could anybody leave her like that?" he now was looking at Jezzy through a wash of water.

"Times are hard here, Jack. We try not to judge, just try to help, that's all."

"Right." He said. He felt his throat choke and he carefully stood the girl back at the little rail in her crib. Her little brown eyes followed him in wonder as he wordlessly strode away from them and out to the back porch facing a jungle, where he breathed hard and rubbed his eyes.

Chap came by his side. "Do you see what I mean Jack?"

"Yes, I do." He said shaking his head at the bitterness he felt for her and for them all. "My problems *are nothing compared to theirs!!!*"

"Right and so now you're being healed."

"What?" he turned so sharply to Chap that the water was flung off his face, he was openly crying at his sudden exile - from torment.

"It shouldn't take helpless orphans to break our hearts and heal our minds, but it does, Jack, it really does."

"Why is that?" he said still far away and struggling with what all this meant. It was so deep, he had never fathomed such things before. However, even Jack could acknowledge that they had some sort of magic – for they were working and he was feeling alive again! He was feeling healed!!

"Because this is the essence of *true* religion – of helping widows and orphans. That's in the 'Big Book', ya know."

"Oh." He looked wide eyed to the man, swallowing heavily.

"I'll stop preachin' now." Chap said winking and Jack actually smiled in big surprise at this: Chaplain's winked? And followed the Chaplain hard at his heels to the car.

And the rest of the day he trailed the chaplain, heeling like a mutt as they visited sailors and marines on various ships who had deaths of loved ones or divorces or various health or financial woes, until the evening came and he chowed alone in the base galley and the darkness receded onto him; and he lay many hours unable to sleep; and the terrors filled his head: Could he make it in the Navy without messing up again? God, he missed his friends! He was nothing without his friends! Dark words like these went squawking like this almost all night long, until the next day, when they went back to the orphanage, and was enlightened once again!

"You gotta mourn him Jack." Chap told him one afternoon, when he was policing up the outside of the chapel.

"You can't just stuff it all inside."

He'd done that before.

"You gotta work it all out of you."

"How?"

"Are you trying the Twelve Steps of AA?"

"Yes."

He was trying, but as he swabbed the deck of the porch subconsciously in the back of his mind against his will he saw a quick little picture he hadn't divorced yet entirely from his head: *of the Enlisted Club, a pool table and bunch of buddies from his ship gathered all around him, and, of course, brews for all*.

It soon became a routine to him to visit every morning, Chap finagled supplies from various sources like bars and brothels and even the Navy. Jack learned each one of their names

and a whole bunch of Tagalog. When they came in the room would explode with delight - something that would never fail to uplift him in the many years to come as he kept coming back – for this cup of healing and it was a rich and wonderful delight Chap had shown him – as good as any rum.

"You're making excellent progress." Said the chaplain to him one day when he was surrounded by the orphans outside on the playground. "Some fellas I have to explain why we're doing all this, Jack. But, not with you. I could tell the second you saw them, that you're getting it."

"I am still hurting inside." He replied across the grass, finally, for there was another one gone that he was mourning heavily too that almost no one knew about.

"They can help heartbreak like nothing else. Just give it time."

"But…"

"Be thankful for heartbreak and tribulation Jack." Chap was saying with his hands uplifted skywards, and the palm fronds rustled in onshore agreement. "It makes you grow as a person like nothing else can! In other words, Jack, you've been blessed."

He pondered Chap's words all night that night. 'Blessed?' He'd been so – what was it? Cardboard! His Chief had been right! He had been mean and arrogant and he swore that he'd never treat an outsider like Tommy meanly again! 'If only I could only have a second chance with Tommy!' he cried said to himself on the pillow deep in the night. And then he thought of poor little Molly, orphaned now, as well.

"I promise you God I will help her," he prayed, bargaining with God, "and little Jezzy. Only I ask you let me stay in the Navy!"

But he still craved the drink. He held his hand up in the light from the base – it twitched a little. Was it the gitters? He didn't want to disappoint the Chaplain by telling him that, he wanted to sneak to the enlisted club not far away, for the but he didn't dare let that great man down and so he suffered many a long sleepless night.

Perhaps he was a drunk? The depraved word 'Alcoholic' echoed far away, no certainly not him. That was Skid Row. No, he just liked to party! What was so wrong about that? Nearly everybody did that. It was not the first time he had grappled with that terminology, which, surely was not about himself. He just liked to have lots of fun! And he loved people and being the exact center of the crowd. Surely booze was a side to that.

One morning the rains were torrential with the remnants of a typhoon and they awaited a break, Chap noticed Jack's eyes were red.

"Are you sleeping well Jack?"

"No, sir."

"What's going on?"

"I've always had some insomnia, but it has been just terrible lately."

"What's bringing it on?"

You're not letting me drink.

"I - uh - I sleep easier on board ship actually, even with the catapult and landings, because we're always so busy that we get so tired out." That was so true, for he slept most wonderfully at sea.

"And now?"

And now I just want a brew.

"…And now I just keep thinking about Poor Tommy." He changed the subject to something that was really haunting him.

"And?"

"Well, I - I have doomed Tommy. Where did he go Chap?"

"I don't know, Jack. That's up to God to judge his soul."

"But he died drunk, Chap – you know – where does that leave him when he's - gone?"

"I don't know Jack, truly."

"I've doomed him!" And *the other* as well. Two lost souls dead drunk and lost forevermore. Lost to eternity and upon his soul!

As he wept in his hands the rains pounded the tin roof in a roar and the electricity flickered on and off and then they sat in the gloom and racket of the storm looking at each other. For once the energetic Chaplain said little, just looking across his desk at Jack, refusing to whitewash Jack's horrors, and in that was paradoxically the comfort of truth itself, that this was no bogus faith for it had very real consequences like the lost soul of Tommy, and the other. "And I can't deal with that!" He told him on the verge of cracking once again. "I held him dying!! I still feel him dying! I cannot forgive myself!"

"Give it to God, then."

"I don't know how!"

"Pray to him!" Chap urged. "Just pray."

"He's not real to me; I can't!"

"Then you must take it until you can."

Welcome to nightmareland.

Back they went to the early morning rounds – sometimes Chap let Jack drive as he read his many letters and sometimes he let

Jack pass out on the back pews when he had long meetings with the brass, over some sailors' dicey careers.

A few days later Chap had Jack buff the foyer - giving it a regulation shine – a Marine buddy in San D had once taught him how to really lay on a beautiful shine and he was actually kind of enjoying himself - when the Chaplain stuck his head out of the office. "Jack come in here." He parked the buffer to the side.

Chap was holding the phone out to him when he came in. "Here Jack."

"Who is it?"

"It's Florence Malloy."

Jack froze in terror, suddenly very unfit again. Chap covered the mouth piece with his hand. "It's going to be okay, Jack, Flo just wants to check on you." He stood there open mouthed and then chap jerked the receiver towards Jack – basically ordering him to take it.

When Chap left the office he said "Hi Flo" lowly.

"Oh Jack! I'm so glad to hear your voice! How are you? Are you okay? Talk to me Jack! Are you there Jack? Jack?"

"I'm here, Flo."

"Jack, I know this must be really hard on you. I know what happened, and Jack I don't hold you responsible – I never would, okay?"

"Well I hold myself…"

"Come on, Jack!"

"He thought you were mad at him, Flo, it nearly drove him insane." *And now I'm going crazy*.

"Now, Jack, I know what my Tommy was, okay?"

"You do?" did she know then of his cheating? Flo was so uncanny, he thought then that she just might know somehow. So no wonder Poor Tommy had been going mad.

"So just come back to us, Jack." She said, instead.

"I'm trying to Flo, I'm…"

"Hi Uncle Jacky!" a squeaky sentence.

"…Uh…Hi Molly." He choked out, tremendously surprised.

"When you coming home again, Uncle Jacky?"

"Oh lordy, I dunno, girl."

"Well, you come back soon, cuz I'm riding my bike now and we can go all over the port sometime, and…" and she went on in her high little voice on little girl things until he heard her mother in the background chiding her to give back the phone.

"Come back to us Jack." Molly repeated.

"Okay."

"You pro-mise??" she squeeked.

"Yes, Molly. I will." He swore away from the mouthpiece; Promises! Promises!

"I'm back Jack." Flo said. "Molly will talk your ears off if you let her."

"Yeah."

"You going to be okay?"

"Yeah, Flo."

"Okay…"

He was back on the beach that night, holding Tommy, and his words came back to him suddenly and he took a sharp breath in.

"What, Jack?" Flo had said.

He took a deep breath "Flo, Listen, I do have something to tell you afterall."

"What's that, Jack."

"He talked to me before — before - he went. I – Flo – I held him as he – went."

"Oh my God! I didn't know that, Jack!" She was breathing heavily and even on an overseas Autovon line, he could hear it.

He was bringing the ghost of Tommy back before the throne of their aching hearts.

"He said to me Flo 'Jack watch out after my little girl will you.'"

"Okay. Good."

"And there's something else, Flo."

"Yes?"

He swallowed. "He told me to tell you something, Flo. He-"

"Yes?"

"He told me to tell you that he was thinking of you when he died."

"Oh, Jack." She said in a hush. He knew she was trying hard not to weep, for his sake.

"Flo, Tommy died in my arms - smiling – thinking of you, Flo."

She said nothing; she was a brave girl, Flo was.

"So, Don't be afraid to cry to me, Flo. I need to be needed by you, now, Flo." As he said it he discovered a profound truth he'd stumbled upon about himself in the orphanage. He needed to be needed! And he needed her tears, too for he wouldn't cry – he was a man. "I'll always be there for you and Molly, now."

And she began to cry "Oh, I miss him so, Jack."

"I do too."

"I'm never gonna see him again, Jack." She cried. "Never ever again. My God!"

"Me too, Flo."

"I'm never going to touch him again…" She wept on the phone and soundlessly his face streamed with water. "And I'm never gonna hold him, ever again!"

There was such haunting in the word 'never.' And Jack knew that he'd never forget that lostworld of a word… Never, oh how

it tortured the soul with hope lost and forbidden release… oh, never, ever, oh, never ever, again… *Tommy's whole story had an abrupt ending there with that word. Never was another word for hell*.

"But…" she stopped him up so suddenly that it was like a car hitting a telephone pole. Man was she strong, much more so than himself! So no wonder Tommy had loved her!

"But, what, Flo!?" he cried out suddenly, while frantically grasping for this life-ring of hope that she had suddenly tossed to him.

"Talking to you makes it better, somehow, Jack…"

"Does it?!" he shook.

"It brings him back to me - somehow."

And somehow it had brought Tommy back to him too - back from the souless, eternal night.

*INSERT PI STORIES, JACK TRAVELS AROUND AREA***

As a part of Chaplain duty, Jack was required to help with service on Sunday, and he showed up early in his summer white crackerjack and turned on all the lights and straightened the pews. He was learning the Commander, who was rapidly becoming his lifelong mentor and even good friend, who sat quietly in his back office with his hands folded – deeply summoning all the powers that came to him in prayer and Jack respectfully left the good man in peace.

He had such respect for Chap by this time and he prepared heavily to brace himself to not fall asleep for the long sleepless nights would hit him if he sat down for very long. He made coffee in the back foyer for himself and drank it black, while considering how he should look, or sit in chapel. He'd not been in church or mass since his mother had died. He found a bench alone in the back.

After all the singing and offering, Chap arose up to the alter solemly and as he began with the parable of a prodigal son that puzzled and sedated Jack's mind and the church spun before him, but he later awoke to sudden words lilting over the rows in an almost songlike words: "… for you would be redeemed - it doesn't matter what you've done, come to the cross on bended knees and receive pardon for your ravaging sins! It's a healing of the utmost kind that I speak of, for, it's not problems and trouble that ruins your lives, but it's iniquity that burns your soul… Do come and find healing from on high…"

The words reverbed through the fathoms of his thoughts, like the echoing songs of the whales out to sea he'd heard once off Adak on his buddies' SONAR Tech's headset in the ASWOC. He felt so unredeemable -- unless when he was helping with the little orphanage, trying to get with this program with the little sisters and service. But oftentimes he felt so daggone tired! Chap had said that this is how people try to dull pain. But he said if he would face it square that it will hurt very hard a long time and then be gone forever. Whatever…

After service he changed and found himself walking out to the orphanage. Jezzy was wheezing so much she couldn't eat and she was wasting away in his arms. He'd have to get more medicine from his buddy in the pharmacy on Monday and he was viciously mad at himself for not bringing something, anything, with him to help her. He felt so frickin helpless suddenly and he was wanting to weep and started to shake instead in anger - still holding her - the nuns came to him, alarmed - and then he was mad at them too and pushed them off - now mad at God, he handed Jezzy back to Sister Maria and left them suddenly. On the way home his posture dared any streetwise punk of Subic Bay to come up to him. It started to downpour. He caught a cab all the way back to the quarterdeck of the barracks.

Then cravings to drink came upon him full force suddenly, when a Chief from his boat crossed his path, and seeing Jack soaked was about to harangue him. But Jack gave him mean, very unmilitary look like "Don't mess with me." He left Jack a wide berth.

He went over to the gym after the down pour and did heavy boxing workout alone in the weight room, hitting the bag heavily, he started to feel better, when a Navy brat kid came in the gym and sitting nearby on a weight bench began poking fun of him, dressed in some sort of silly karate jujes. "Why don't you hit it a little harder, dude!"

"Shut-up." He said still speed drilling.

"Something's got you ticked."

"Yeah! You!" He roared.

"Awe, come on, just trying to get you to laugh – at yourself!" And the kid leaned back laughing openly and heartily, and without even a speck of fear, though he could have been at least fifty pounds lighter and a foot shorter and Jack certainly could have hauled him up and thrown him across the gym.

"I'll laugh when I knock your freckles into next week." He said trying to ignore him and get back to business with left hooks to the bag and upper jabs.

"Ha! That's a clever line. I haven't heard that one before!"

"Whatever." Punch. Punch. Punch-punch. Punch-punch.

The more angry Jack got somehow the more the kid wanted to laugh and it was such a nasal, Midwestern laugh that it annoyed Jack in itself.

"Look, kid, I'm trying to get a workout in here!" he was standing over him now, all 6'4 inches inches of him in a rage.

"Yeah, a workout of anger!" the punk laughed even more.

"Do you mind, minding your own business!" he menaced the kid with his eyes.

"Hey! When someone is that mad, it is my business."

"Oh! Come on now!" He stopped boxing, exasperated – this kid was enjoying being a smartass, know-it-all to an adult and his eyes were going into the starpoints of rage, that he hated. 'Just like Tommy.' He muttered to himself under his breath, shaking his head, he tried to resume boxing.

"Oh yeah, Tommy…" The kid nodded, pretended to know why Jack was so messed up. "You gotta let him go."

"What! You don't know shit!"

But the kid only smiled in reply.

And then something snapped so suddenly in Jack – he had been fuming just like his old man, and he suddenly found himself calmed. He laughed a little in amazement at the kid's utter lack of fear and Jack found himself laughing too, squatting down next to him on the deck gesturing with his gloved hands: "I'm sorry guy." He'd said to him and they had laughed together like old school chums playing craps in the schoolyard. "You remind me of him."

"Now that's more like it, dude."

"Whatever!" Jack said laughing and jumped up smiling back to him hit the bag elegantly with a few jabs grinning, he left the kid sitting there in the gym.

He walked back to the barracks now spent and quiet after all workouts made him. He promised himself he'd work out more – when not out to sea. It made him feel so healthy and alive. Clearheaded he thought about the young kid in the weight room, who'd broken his daylong tirade of rage, when it dawned on him suddenly – how could the kid have really known when he'd said the name Tommy that it had unpacked his heart of all hate?

Back on Board

The USS _____

[note need another ship documented to be in the PI at this time and coordinate it with Jack's story.}

Too soon his TAD was up at the Chaplain's office. And he told the Chaplain that he was very sorry to be leaving.

"Don't worry, just keep helping others and you'll get better."

"But who do I help on a ship. Everyone's young and well."

"But everyone has problems Jack.

"I know, but…"

"Well, if you should somehow run out of troubles on a ship of 5000 young men, remember the orphanage, okay? We can always use donations, Jack."

"Yessir."

Chap pulled up to the gangway of the _____ (Kitty Hawk??). "Fair winds and following seas to you, Jack. Keep in touch. I'd like to hear from you from time to time."

"Thank you sir, for everything. It truly was my pleasure to work for you during this time." And he shook the chap's hand warmly. "I won't forget you, Sir."

"Nor I you, Jack."

And Jack took a step back and saluted Commander Adams as sharply as he could and took a breath in for what he must face and he stepped back and did a sharp about-face.

Chap watched him go. He'd once been a non-rate long ago, working the flight deck on the *Saratoga* when he'd been sucked into the intake of an F-4 and chewed up his arms. He'd gone to school on the GI bill and many years later now he was a Chaplain in the Navy. But he missed those many days to sea and on the flight deck and he missed that confidence Jack held with such dignity despite his grief…

And Jack's shoulders were straight back they bore the load better, with a great dignity, solemn and off he went up the pier, to the guard shack, then up the gangway, sharply saluting the colors at the stern and then the OOD, then he disappeared into her gray belly. On a ship of more than 5000 men Chaplain Adams hoped some would slap him on the back in a male ceremony of sympathy worth a thousand woman's tears, for there never seemed to be a steady girl to cry over Jack. Back he went into the towering gray fortress - a sailing fortress that'd soon sweep him away - to the high bridge where he steered and navigated and stood tall amongst captains, standing tall in the shield of pain he would ever carry like his own cross for all his tours to sea.

Chaplain Adams had written the skipper of his ship an excellent letter of recommendation and this had fought to keep Jack in the Navy and fought to keep him on deck too, for a crackerjack seaman, he was and as long as he was on the bridge

or the CIC he did well, inspiring others while plotting *Kitty's* long sojourn round the world, for she was a great pioneer this ladyship, she was. "America's Flagship" President Reagan would later nickname her upon a stately visit.

[correct historical info here after research]

With a saturation of folks, no time for grief and yet Jack did terribly grieve. They say all the great Jack-charm left him that day Tommy Malloy, plunged into the sea. Such a shame, for no one else blamed Jack 'cept his chief's fault-finding cruise into the Jack sea of conscious - into his very abyss of despair.

Two down, One more to go... Upon his shoulders he carried that woe.

"I am from a long line of hard drinkers.." he had been telling Chap one day: "My family's a clan of drunks from the back hollars of West Virginia."

"But not your father's side?" Chap had asked, for Jack's father was from a stoic lineage of Nor'Eastern seafarers off Cape Hatteras, and so was his super squared-away cousin, Tim. "Yeah, but I still got the wild McClannahan tainted blood in me." That what his father had told him, an echo which had resounded time and time again when he was sad or undone: "*You're nothing but a drunk, Jack."*

He stood watch out to sea with this heavy on his shoulders, and the death of his best friend. But to sea, e're a sobering sea, circumnavigation on a great cruise of grief.. every meal he tried to take alone, in the corner of the galley, hunched over the table, festering his grief down with the chow, trying not to weep over his tray, and on watch at night with only the port light for night's vision and hellish red illume into the depths and torture of his soul. For Tommy and for the other he offered his heart.

In pre-muster, in ranks-joking in the hanger bay or on the flattop on clear days, he held his silent vigil and longed for one day of peace and solace.

One day after many of these… after a long sojourn in hell itself, his comrade sailors told a joke in ranks about the uptight new LPO and Jack had actually smiled.

"Hey, that joke was so good, even McCracken liked it." Someone had said. As morningtime makes the night that much darker to behold the waning vespers of his grief!

Mess cranking is the traditional duty of all new seaman - he had to do that duty, again on his new ship, in the steamy scullery - of washing metal eating trays, of pots and

pans, of the ships bowels; when he had once plotted the very ship's course and took the commands down of the captain on the bridge, and kept Kitty’s nose pointed into the wind and wavetrains. The steamy kitchen purged some of the poisons from him - for there's nothing like hard physical work to stave off the mind from torturing the body. He was glad, for lately he seemed to not be able to handle a detailed job as he used to.

He chided himself strongly “Jack get your damned head out of your ass” but in the scullery there was nothing to mess up – except missing a quarters call or a formation – stuff he did sometimes to his great frustration and against his nature he buried his head in his work, trying desperately to not mess up again. But he still did!

*FLIGHT OPS- ADD***

After finishing up mess cranking a shift, he was removing his gloves thinking to himself as he had lately "Well, that's a good job Jack." Others didn't seem to screw up as much as he did. "Perhaps I should be a MS – work in the galley the rest of my career." He shook his head though, that didn't seem to be the right fit either as he looked all around him and took in all the equipment and recipes that terrorized him. "Oh well I have some time to figure things out." But he actually didn't for the very next day he was ordered back to the flight deck once again.

"Oh shit." He remembered how dangerous it was, especially since he wasn't very clear headed these days and now he could screw up in a variety of ways including multi-million dollar jets and billion dollar aircraft carriers. "I don't mind getting hurt, I just don't want to hurt others!" he was really very tense as he reported to the muster.

Days like this, he was chowing down, stressed out to the hilt and hunkered over his tray for soon he'd be on deck once again, back into the danger zone, he really missed his family.

His father's side were mostly very wealthy – only he and his cousin Tim were not lawyers, engineers or even a doctor - like his older brother, Eric, 'The Great' was and now for years and years being an enlisted sailor – and blue collar like a mechanic when other cousins were so accomplished. It wasn't that his aunts and uncles rejected him, they just simply disregarded him and Tim, too, over the years and years they were gone in the Navy, they forgot about them on Christmases, and, he gritted his teeth, even as they gathered together on Veteran's Day!

For, life was hard out here without the awaiting glory of a homecoming overdue them, and carepacks from the States and cards if had ever been mailed would've said: 'hey you're still one of us.' If Mom were alive, she'd connect them all to him, but with her gone, well, it seemed that it was too much work for them to find out where he was, or if he still was anymore. So much shame and blame, how did they think of him with her gone?

And, so he chose to be of the Wilds, where girls of the Pacific Rim were of his homecomings, of the Streets and Dungenous Maze of Hong Kong, or Mumbasa or Bangkok to release all this stress and duress, founded upon the flightdeck and most dangerous jobs in the world.

'The Battlefields' he called the swells that followed them everywhere were realy waging war that day

In the dips and troughs of concentric siegeworks where they did contend with Her, for no foe put a name and a face to Photograph their true arch enemy as *She, Their Sea* as he looked, now on watch, put green water on flight deck! Alas no landing today, but they still had to stand there, guarding their boat in all that action and wind..four hours at a time in Gale Force Winds of fourty knots or more to take it, reporting contacts in the straits on their sound-powered phones.

And the next day, the same intense action of jets screaming and a sailor knocked over – AB3 hit by jet wash and over board he went a three story fall! And so 'Man Over Board!' stations and the helos flew SAR mission and stressful urgent maneuvers of fishing him out. And today this sailor was okay, thank God, and he went to sickbay and layed there the day, letting the kinks unwind from his muscles where the Sea, herself, had battered him soundly!

And another day brought an UNREP – underway repenishments that brought the whole ship provisions on lines from ship to ship, and fuel from the oiler to the Carrier.

A lonely life at times, on a ship with so, so many aboard, for there was not space to just be, withot requiste glory due them, no battles here for the seaworthiness except 'The Battle E' they had earned recently and wore over their hearts, with all the other honors overdue them.

Now the birds came back from their sorties – and flew right at you – no deck was big enough! They flew right at you! He looked across the deck at them all.

DANGER!

And his buddy grinned at him right through it, as they aligned another F-4 ready to *shot-put her into the sky!*

The roar of a rocket so close by!

As he struggled to do his job and keep his head, he struggled to make sense of it all:

Who were these guys out here with him?
Heroes, or Retreads?
Which one was he?

The QMs on deck high above him in the superstructure were ordered to turn her into the wind for more landings, and:

"AWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWwwwwwwwUUUUuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuhhhhhhhh!"

Mail Plane landed. They directed her about the deck in their well choreographed dance.

Then a Roar of fire! An F-4 Phantom with fun, outgoing LT Kelly of Plymouth, Indiana, sitting pretty on the deck, saluting and about to be launched, here was a hero, certainly, but where did that leave him?

And soon a leave in Yokusuka and the din and maelem of two thousand sailors to port at a time, and a quiver of babes to be made that night… Ah! Last night too wonderful and a beautiful and a strangley statuesque Michiko on his arm till the last call, who was his consort most his nights to port, to the Ginzo District and to elequant restaurant where Geisha girls still served them there, on bended knees.

After the last liberty, he started loosening up and seeing all the craziness in an insane brand of humor – and once you became so frazzled and stressed, there was no stopping the laughter – or too soon you'd be crying like a little schoolgirl! Like Tommy.

One day he was standing abaft the beam during landings between the birds explosions on deck and he heard strange, surreal laughter coming through his earphones and talk and could not find anyone around him talking and it was so strange until he looked way aft and found, to his amazement were three sailors, completely zoned out on LSD, he thought, as least, laying right in the catch net in the full path were the birds landing! And! They were laughing as the birds flew right upon them and potentially could scorch them burning them to death!!

"Check it out, Scarecrow!" he yelled at AV3 Crowe, pointing aft emphatically.

"Woe!!" Crowe cried and stood amazed.

"The Druggies!" he said shaking his head, furious. He worked hard for all his attention to detail! And here were these guys who didn't have to smack themselves to do a job right – here they were blowing away all their consciousness!! He became enraged:

"Hey, you Zombies!" Jack screamed at them "Get the hell outta there!!!"

And they just laughed and laughed at him, and then an F4 was coming in a few miles out and within seconds Jack and Crowe saw it landed right upon them just about and they still laughed and the LSO – Landing Signal Officer - came, seeing the commotion of Jack and Crow screeming and held up all the landings now! He just and screeming screaming at them too!

"Courts marshalls for sure!!" Crowe yelled as they watched the Marines ran over and grabbed them cuffing them and the flock of overdue birds came down immediately from the sky!!

"They were flown off the ship that very day!" Crowe told him later, after listening to the scuttlebutt in the galley.

"Damn straight, the Navy finally got that damn one right!"

"They'll surely get BCDs." He said meaning - Bad Conduct Discharges – "A BCD is a felony, by the way!"

"Well, they could have become French Toast today, instead!"

"Yeah! Then we all would have caught hell for it – drug dogs, locker sweeps and etc!"

"The Dumb asses!" He swore, his fist curled. "They all make me sick! I fricken hate drugs!"

That story went round and round about the deck that day and they could not keep from shaking their heads during the rest of flight ops at the zombies and druggies, and soon laughter came between even as the caught the birds on one of the wires and sooner than they realized EVERYTHING became ridiculous in the microscope of life on board that boat!!

Normal human behavior – or guy stuff – became magnified and distorted on the ship that big. Crazy stuff like this happened all the time and the Skipper would just throw up his hands as the line for Captain mast got longer and longer each week! The longer they stayed out to sea, the more distorted and weird things got and then, they'd explode into the town of Olongapo in a volcanic eruption of release like Mt Pinatubu itself!

It was why they tolerated the liberty wildness in port, because flight ops was so tense, so stressful. But then, it was a different world back then; oldtimers called 'The Old Nav." It was their world, for they had once faught for it, the very battles of Leyte Straits [research!].

--many more stories, incidents, liberties, ships histories, as Jack gets better, it gets more hysterical

And, just when he'd got it all down – the ferocious sense of humor needed to be a flight deck sailor, the strange bearing to look danger straight in the eye and not even blink, and deal with other's tempers, just when he'd honed the extreme bearing and attention needed to face combat really, that's when they transferred him back up to the bridge!

Striking for QM

"Maybe I'm not a bridge kind of guy." That's where the Captain stood and he felt very unbalanced and terrorized, again… Jack had kind of a secret agony that he'd never told *anyone* about – but one of his very first chiefs on his first TAD in San D had once helped him very greatly by observing that his ASVAB score in 'Attention to Details' was a 43 out of 100! His buddy Joe Baxter had a 94 here and his yeoman friend Freddy a mincing 98. But alas his was 43! What was wrong with him? Was he a retard?

Now he had at least a bearing to fix to this secret shame, 43! Now he could kick his own butt to fix it, but somehow the tighter he gripped on it, the worse it got! And he twisted numbers around constantly! Oh, God, how he tried to hide this embarrassment! And sometimes he got into fights when it was bothering him the most, for, it was agonizing to not be able to do a job that even the dumbest did!! Cash Registering - Agonizing! Typing – Wrenching! Log Book entries – torture! And so on… And he, he hid it so well, that one did not see the fists clench as he got up to the bridge struggling to do the logbook entries neatly enough – in high seas - or help with accurate bearings and fixes on the Loran-C and reading the barometer just right!

Any kind of aircraft needed a correct barometer reading – for the altimeter on a jet was based on the sea surface pressure. Having a jet pilot's life in his hands always struck him with a particular agony – how he had struggle to do that right!

His uniform helped to hide 'the prob'from his LPO and Chief – always so sharp and polished – but God, if they could see his handwriting!! His checkbook- a scratchy tally of unknown origins – who knows how much he had!!

And he was all: "Yessir, No-sir, Aye! Aye! Sir. Affirmative Sir, Negative Sir. He held his shoulders back, popped to Attention when he spoke to the 'uppers' And he kept himself conservative, and 'RegNav' as sure as poop. [replace poop] Wrapped around like a bowline, he tied the knot of military bearing around the stevedores neck and anchored himself and his career to the Nav. No one could say he didn't have a good attitude. But what they didn't know was this secret agony: *there was nothing else he could do but this!*

Anything little, tedious became like pulling teeth, excrutiating and he wished he'd joined the Seabees and become a dirt pusher! Funny the life and death of the flight deck truly did not scare him like the log book entries, or the atmospheric

pressure entries on the weather computer – the COMMEDS - or balancing of his checkbook!! Shame! He could tell no one!

He was beginning to wonder if his old woes were coming back to him after *she* had died. He hadn't ever delt with it firmly, not really, he had just run away and ran off to sea and stuffed her death deep down inside. The orphans had indeed helped him deal with Tomm… but when it came to her, he stuffed it all deep back down the hatch and he just couldn't do anything any more…

[More stories of ADD]

The Smoker

He'd still get at times lost on the ship – despite the frame markers to guide them, and his many years on board other ships. He'd get to thinking about something on way back from watch and he'd forget where he was and how to get "home." He had to leave early to get to work, so he wouldn't have to ask where the ladder was topsides! He'd get all twisted and turned and could ask no one for help, it was so embarrassing. He missed chow a time or two and he'd get dizzy and light headed and arrived to watch late. He finally went to the new chief's compartment about these troubles. "I'm having trouble concentrating sometimes," that I mean, I'm not trying to get out of work, I just want to be honest with you about that."

"Look, Seaman McCracken, talk to your duty section officer about it, and get it together with him. But I still want you qualed in two months time." He could see there was no mercy or understanding with this guy and instead the chief's attitude heaped upon him more stress and misery.

However on his very first watch Jack actually took his chief's advice and talked to his new duty officer who seemed very relaxed and understanding – considering he was an officer. His name was Ensign O'Reilly and he was from Worchester, Mass and soon they were getting along great and Jack was actually excelling himself in his job, thanks to the nature of the guy!!

"Look, you watch out after me and I'll watch out after you, Deal?"

"Yessir!" Jack said shaking his hand and he popped to attention to show him respect.

Paul waved him off "Oh, I, too, have the same problem, too."

"No, sir, you couldn't have it as bad as me!" he said pulling him aside, urgently.

"Well, maybe not, but you just watch and see, I screw up too, all so very easily!"

And Jack had studied the guys face in wonder.

"Look, Jack, let's say we messed up on the sea surface pressure on a calm sunny day, well, can't the flyboys see the damn sea surface out there window, anyway?"

"Yessir." And he was laughing a little at this.

"We'll be extravigilant on low ceilings and stormy days and let's work towards greater accuracy as we both go along, okay?"

"Yessir!" Jack said feeling great, for it was in such comradeship that he had always prevailed!

And he was right, but in this strange comradeship in the next few months, both of them learned their jobs flawlessly and honed to perfection the job on the bridge requiring so much attention to detail and military bearing. They both helped each other through it and Jack was starting to feel not so handicapped again! Jack had to learn some of the weather terms and with the entire set of cloud types – stratus, cumulus, cirrus, and together they studied them using every kind of sexual position known to man, to remberize all the cloud types and their associated altitudes, called 'the 26 states of sky' for QMs subbed for the 'weather guessers' the AGs – the 'Weathermen' on smaller ships.

He threw himself into the qual the Station Bill, everything, he was just ravenous to learn, now that he could and he was beginning to get noticed for his strenuous efforts and military bearing on the bridge. He wondered in his head at times if there was something wrong with him, but, he was gifted with this officer and at times out to sea, he even mouthed a thought or two of thanksgiving to the stars above his ship.

Lt O'Reilly had a strong accent and an opinion on just everything. And he loved sports and could carry on about just any team in the nations. Jack even called him Paul when they were alone on the bridge. Paul was a weight lifter and together they sometimes met before watch for a quick pump up in the gym right before watch at 3 am (or, lifer's hour). After about four months of this the two guys were getting quite buff and getting notices about that. He felt just great! He began tossing things out of his life, like the occasional cigarette, excessive interest in booze and broads, and just happy to be doing so well.

Before watch he'd stood overlooking the distant horizon, and the sun was reaching with the tendrils of her rays defining another glorios day at sea and Paul had joined him.

"I love that." Paul had said, looking upon the dawn and the gray outlines of the ship were silhouetted as she subtly swayed herself in the lavender swells. As they talked, the sound of the ship steaming through the seas and gulls cries, the bridge watch ringing-in 0600 on the ships bells over the 1MC. And then the red of the sun on the skyline came, arising after the nights squals the sun slivered herself up to reveal the great baby blue backdrop of yet another glorious day at sea.

"Somewhere out there is China." Paul had been pointing with his coffee mug. "…and over there Polynesia, the Marianas, the P.I. and Australia beyond." He had said and Jack drank them all in. "And somewhere way over there, Jack, is our island home – *The Americas*."

"The Americas…" Jack echoed, rubbing away the goosebumps on his arms. Ah..The Americas…

"One feels connected to it all out here."

"Yessir, we do."

Paul had been unafraid to love the sea, he was guiding Jack, in his way – though he was only thirty-two, he was his comrade, his leader, even his family! He was very grateful for the guy and it turned his heart to finer things, once his head was so deeply lifted from his butt!!

After he got his QM rating badge, he lifted his coffee cup up to him one night on the bridge, far out to sea, "Sir, I owe you a beer next time in port." Once he said it, Jack realized the guy was helping him, just like the Chap had said to and that it was high time to start helping others himself! He was very grateful to be able to do his job so well now and that gratitude stretched towards service just as Chap had once asked him to do.

So, he brought up to Paul one night the idea of having a tournament of some sorts to help out the little orphanage in Olangapo and Paul was loaded with ideas.

"What about a *Smoker,* Jack?" Paul asked.

"What's that?"

"It's a boxing match on board."

"Why's it called that?"

"Who knows."

"Would they let us do something like that?"

"Sure, there's been boxing on board since World War Two. In fact, the *Midway* had boxing right off Yankee Station, in the summer of '68."

"It's a great idea, but I don't know of any boxers, Paul."

"Well, I do! I follow amateur boxing on the beach and sometimes I even do refereeing from time to time and I just happen to have noticed that Sgt O'Meara's on board - he's a giant Irish Viking from South Dakota and a boxer as well as a Marine Force Recon with the MarDet. It so happens that 'Fast Eye Eddy' is on this boat too, he's now an engineering officer and former SEAL Team Commander. I just happened to put it together the other day that they are on the same boat together and they both don't even know it! I was already trying to think of some good reason for a rematch and this one is perfect."

"Are they evenly matched?

"Yeah! Whew! They fought one time professionally in a club in Oceanside, California, right next to Camp Pendleton - and they went ten rounds. O'Meara lost by only one single point – which the ref just had to end it some way – favoring an officer, and, of course, O'Meara's been spoiling for a rematch ever since."

"No kidding." Jack said warming up to the idea, this could really be something if properly handled! He could personally talk to some five to six thousand Sailors and Marines.

"If I do this would you consider talking to both fighters with me, sir?"

"Love to, Jack, it's just up my alley."

"…and also to the big brass?"

"Sure, Jack."

"We could even make it a Navy versus Marines event."

"Or, officers versus enlisted." Teased the ensign.

"Ha! Right. I even could get the whole ship to put out a pot – so, there'd be some monetary action to thing."

"That'd be the thing – to make it pay out for the charity."

"That's right – for the charity."

And the rest of the watch was calm seas and quiet and they kicked around scores of ideas and ways to make it work and he could scarcely sleep later as he lay in his rack, for once sleepless for an exciting reason instead of the usual dread.

Of course Chief Booker wasn't too happy about the smoker, saying connivingly "If your having trouble concentrating, how can you do all this extra stuff?"

"I don't have a choice in the matter." Said Jack. "Comander Adams ordered me to do AA community service for them."

"Yes, McCracken, but for how long?"

"However long does it take, Chief?" Answered Jack back and the chief could say nothing to that.

"Well, you'll have to get dozens of permissions, starting with the Skipper's, the Ops Boss, etc, and, of course the Master Chief of the Boat. It's not going to be easy thing to set up, Jack."

"Yes, Chief."

"And if I see you failing at your job, I reserve the right to take your Smoker away, McCracken."

"Yes, Chief."

Afterwards Jack went to his compartment where he saw he had a new rackmate moving in on the top rack, named Rick Kucera, a guy he'd seen a few times in the bars of Subic some where. He had enormous brown eyes and looked just like a Latin Peter Lorre with a great head of hair and everyone knew Rick's nickname was: "Famous Rick' Kucera".'

"Black Jack McCracken!" He was holding out his hand in sailor shake "We meet again!" He was very easy going and friendly and sooner than Jack realized he was also including Rick in all his plans for the tourney.

Later that week Jack and Ensign O'reilly came upon Sgt O'Meara in the hanger bay where the Marines were on the deck cleaning their M16s and reassembling them. He wondered how Marines kept busy on board ship during a cruise. Then he was remembering Gar. Hope this guy doesn't know Gar…

Sgt O'Meara was an enormous Marine – even back then – standing 6'5" and perhaps weighing close to 270 pounds of pure muscle. He had blonde hair so light and so short he looked shaven. He had a bearing of one whose seen tremendous amount combat, probably in Vietnam, with special ops and he drew Paul and Jack's respect from a far, as they approached the Marine Detachment. Jack hoped he hadn't heard of his old fight in Olangapo with Garfiglio, or him being Wog Quessn, and he was on edge about this…

"Seargent O'Meara?" Paul called out ahead of them.

"Yessir." O'Meara managed to say with suspicion mixed so perfectly with military bearing as he stood at attention. He was so enormous that he inspired pure terror to him, though Jack was by no means small.

"At ease, O'Meara. Perhaps you don't remember me, Seargent, but I met you at mass on the beach in San D and also when you faught 'Fast Eye Eddie' in Oceanside last year."

"Oh, that joke of a fight -- sir." He said, seething still it seems. His eyes wide open saying what do you want with me?

"I still think that the ref gave it to him because he was an officer."

"Exactly." O'Meara said glancing down at Paul's 'butter bars' of an ensign.

"If we can arrange it, how would you like a second crack at the guy?"

"Sir, I'd murder him, if it's a fair fight." He said nonchalantly as if it were fact and one would believe it without question coming from this Force Recon Marine in front of them. But, he actually had a sense of humor it seems, for he actually smiled a little after he said that.

"Well how about it?" Jack stepped in and O'Meara glared at him – who's this seaman butting in? And Jack took this that O'Meara didn't recognize him.

"Where is Eddie?"

"He's onboard ship."

"No kidding." O'Meara put down his M16 on the table and they followed him as he walked closer to the open bay. "What department is he in?"

"That's our side to it, Sgt O'Meara."

"What's in it for me?"

"It's just for a good cause, O'Meara. Tell him Jack."

"I want to raise some money for an orphanage in the P.I. Here, look Sergeant." He handed to O'Meara a stack of photos he'd taken on his last day there – of the sisters and Chaplain Adams and the little girls, the cribs, the dirty playground, etc, and as O'Meara thumbed through them with his enormous hands Jack rattled off the incredibly disheartening statistics from memory that the Chaplain had told him about the street kids and the rag pickers and how there were now tens of thousands of Amerasian children and most were destitute.

"Not only could we help them you could get your rep back."

"Hmmmmmm."

"We still have to get permission from the Captain and others. We just wanted to see if you were interested to start with." O'reilly said.

"I'd pay *you* to fight him again." He said handing the pictures back.

"Great!" Jack said.

"Now wait a minute." O'Meara held up a giant finger, "I'll only fight him if there's a fair ref this time."

"Well, what do you think of me?" said Paul thumbs to his chest.

"You're an officer and a squid -- sir."

"Right. But, O'Meara, I'm a fair officer – aren't I Jack? Plus I think you got a bad call last time – remember now I saw that fight."

"Hmmmm." O'Meara said lifting his eyebrows up interested. "I would need to train a little."

"Right. Well, start at it, because it's going to take a while to get permissions."

"Have you told 'Eddy' yet."

"No." Jack said. "We thought we'd talk to you first, Seargent."

"Oh, really?" said O'Meara quietly, he folded his arms briefly in a millisecond loss of Marine military bearing and then dropped them quickly again to his sides.

"Sure."

"Well keep me informed on how it goes, and I'll start training." He managed another crack of a smile.

"Alright." And they both shook SGT O'Meara's hand.

"That was easier than I thought."

"I thought he was going to tear my head off when we first went up there."

"Naw Jack, he's Marine Force Recon, but he's actually one of the nicest guys I've met - anywhere."

"You could have fooled me."

"If you get to talk him outside of the ship, he's quite nice. He goes to the same mass I do in San D." he said leading them towards the main passageway.

"No kidding."

"No kidding. But, I guess he doesn't remember me."

"You go to mass, Sir?"

"Every now and then - when the *flavor* hits me." He said winking.

"Huh!" Jack said laughing, out-foxed and delighted. He never knew religion could be such fun. Or was it - joy?

"I'm just a '*Cussin' Catholic'* mostly, Jack."

"Ha! Me too, Mr.O'Reilly, me too!"

'Fast Eye Eddie' was a wiry officer of Italian lineage, officially Lieutenant Sanchez (Veranzano), he was very tall and quick on his feet and energetic – he was easy to see as rather lethal if left on his own in an enemy rice paddy. Paul informed Jack that, Sanchez too, had been in Special Forces – as a SEAL team commander and had been wounded far behind enemy lines in 'Nam and went back into [1800] engineering. They poked in and around the giant boilers, the terrifically loud heartbeat of the 'Hawk'*and* found him transcribing various gauges into a Navy logbook.

"That's not 'Fast Eye Eddy' is it sir?" Paul yelled over the boilers.

"Yes, Mr. O'Reilly!" He yelled, looking at Paul's nametag. "May I help you!"

"Not still fighting are you, sir?!"

"Here and there! Beg your pardon, I'm rather busy, but what's it to you?"

"Sgt Sean O'Meara's onboard and is saying he can whip your tail – sir!"

He stopped what he was doing and smiled a little in surprise and motioned to leave the boiler compartment and into a quieter engineering space.

"That Marine I beat in Oceanside?"

"Yessir! He's saying he got a bad call and he wants to even up the score!"

"He does, does he now?!" He crossed his arms, intrigued. Then he looked and saw Jack. "What are you two, two sports promoters?!"

"Yessir. Actually it's for a good cause, sir!" Jack threw in.

And they both told him all about it and showed him the pictures.

Sanchez asked all kinds of questions about the orphanage and Jack gave his spiel and stats. He paused, flipping through his calendar, perhaps thinking of his fitreps. “Okay, I think I’ll be able to do this.” And then he gave them actual suggestions on approaching the Captain of the ship, also suggesting they do it before they ‘cross the line’ again because of the gigantic revelry exhausted during that.

As they left the compartment Jack thought he they’d have to intentionally make one the underdog or the villain, to sell tickets by the bushel, probably Sanchez, cause he was dark and menacing, and, an officer.

“What you need to do is to talk to the Master Chief of the Ship first and get him to help you on how you approach the Captain. It’s all downhill if you get the Master Chief on your side.”

“That’s a great idea.”

“Never forget, it’s the Chiefs that run the Navy.”

“Yessir.” They both said.

“And you tell that S.O.B. O’Meara I got him fair and square last time and get ready for a tale whipping once again!”

“That went well too. What? What’s wrong?”

“Geez, Paul I’m a little worried about talking to the Chiefs and Master Chief – I’ve already had a couple of Captain Masts. In fact, there was supposed to be another mast about Tommy’s death and that somehow had never happened, nor had anyone given him any kind of final disposition on it and he was loath to inquire about it further lest he dig it back up. What if the Master Chief dug into his service record?

“The Brass will all find out that you’re trying to make it up. Think of it that way.”

“Yeah, but they all know I’m no good.”

“Don’t talk of yourself that way.”

“I mean, they see me as a trouble maker.”

“Yeah, but you can change their minds if you talk to him like you did to O’Meara and Sanchez about the orphans. Even the pictures speak for you - that you’re not all that bad.”

“Right.” Jack said, but he was unconvinced.

The next week they found themselves in their best uniforms talking to the Master Chief of the Boat – ABCM Bangor, both gittering standing before the desk of a man of such great power.

Master Chief Bangor inspired their respect from a far, for, though he was enlisted, he was, indeed, a man of enormous presence and strength, with years of outfoxing up his regulation sleaves and ribbons upon ribbons decorated his uniform upon his

chest; here was a bonifide lifer in front of them and the Navy was his true religion.

Of course he recognized Jack right off – calling him by name first off – Jack knew he'd been pigeonholed already as a dirtbag, but soon after speaking he found the Master Chief alert as if to give him some kind of chance afterall, just like Paul had said.

They'd talked it over before hand, although Paul was the officer, this was really Jack's tournament – from his heart and that this might redeem himself to the upper echelon some if he did some of the first talking and Paul's side to it was guidance, sports promotion and refereeing.

"Master Chief, we have come to see you today because we would like to hold a Smoker for a benefit for a charity, sponsored by a Navy Chaplain in Olongapo."

"A boxing tournament…?"

"Mixed martial arts, actually.'

Whatever you called it, but to the Master Chief it sounded like broken bones, trouble and ferrying off the wounded off the ship by helo afterwards and then a brisk talk with the Admiral afterwards. But then he remembered the precedence of *Kitty Hawk* had had boxing matches once off the Gulf of Tonkin.

Paul stepped in "These are two professionals already, Master Chief. They have fought before in Oceanside, California – I personally saw that fight. It was well fought and nobody got injured more than usual. It just so happens that I noticed that they are both stationed on this ship coincidently – or perhaps fatefully - and a rematch could be a real thrilling fight – with good payoff for the little orphanage in return…"

After multitudes of questions, the Master Chief did not seem too happy about it and said that he would really have to consider talking it over before going up to the skipper.

"Why are you doing this McCracken?" he said finally looking over to Jack. And Jack, never one born to much introspection, had not really thought over his answer on this particular quesy question – so he stumbled and humbly gave him his only motivation "It's cuz of Tommy." He said softly, humbled, and almost whispering.

"Tommy Malloy?"

Wow, the name of their fallen shipmate was still fresh on his mind! Jack thought.

"It's for service Master Chief."

"Oh." He said. He got it. "For AA."

"Yes, Master Chief, for AA."

Neither of them could have known that he, too, had gone to AA for alcoholism years ago, and he still went from time to time when he was at home on the beach. Suddenly he was encouraged to

see this young seaman take initiative like this, when he'd been in so much trouble beforehand. So in a few days he called them back up after tossing it around with his crony chiefs and asked many more questions and set up an appointment to see the Captain, who if gave approval, they would then stand before the morning briefing and tell all the big brass.

A few days later on their watch Captain Taylor himself came on bridge alone except for his marine sentries for security, and Jack thought to himself man, a stroke of good luck – on a day I have my best uniform on: 'Jack, you can reach this guy!" He whispered to Ens Reilly, "Make me a bet I'll get the skipper to talk about the match. I wanna jump over many heads and ask him personally, myself."
Paul's eyes got big but he said "Alright, fifty bucks."

So Jack went right up to him and popped to attention And said like a Ricky Recruit:

"Captain Taylor, I respectfully request a moment of your time."

"Go on McCracken." Said the Captain eyes narrowing, the Marine Security around him tensed up and paid attention.

"Sir, Lieutenant Reilly and I have a chit snaking up the chain of command to hold a fighting tournement to benefit an orphanage in Olangapo sponsored by Navy Chaplain Commander Dan Adams. And I thought I'd use this opportunity to sell you on the idea in person."

"Go on…"

Jack pulled out his wallet where he had pictures stuffed of him holding Jezzy and standing with the Sister and the Chaplain, and the Captain was dually impressed, for the photos depicted the touching and sensational way of his cause and how personally Jack was already involved in it. Then Jack told him his angle about having Marines versus Navy and how that could generate shipwide interest in the fight to garner a great deal of money for the orphanage. And what do you know the Captain of the ship said:

"Sounds feasible, Seaman McCracken, but you'll actually have to talk to Master Chief Bangor about it. If he goes for it, so will I."

"Yessir!" Jack said popping to attention again. "We already talked to him and he already said the same thing about you, sir." Jack said smiling a dazzle.

"Someone will get back to you about it, then, McCracken."

"Yes, sir, and thank you." And he popped back to attention and did a smart about-face and walked into the navigation compartment where Paul was standing by the chart table smiling.

And Paul pulled him aside to the taffrail after the skipper left "Jack, get your butt into recruiting! You're a born sales man!"

"Naw…"

"You know," he said turning to face the sea for more privacy and emphasis, he told Jack "You know, Jack, it's not just the tourney that they want a part of, they want a part of you, Jack - even the Skipper does. I can see it for myself. You're a - a phenomenon."

"A what?" he said surprised.

"You've got star-power… Charisma. I feel it too. I want to be a part of your winning thing too. Even though I am an officer and a part of it already, I feel drawn to it too - I feel drawn to your cause and -- to you."

He flushed red at this, and gulped at this esteemed officer's statement. O'reilly had shown great vulnerability to show him something strong of himself and it caused an intense revisioning of himself. 'I am rezoning my section of town into a winner!' he said to himself. "So-what attention-to-details messes with me, Paul! Perhaps I can outshine them!"

"Yes you can! You're a born leader Jack." Humbly said the Ensign who had the rank.

And these words shook him to his soul and that was the day the legend of Jack had really begun, spoken into being by his good friend, and boss, of The WestPac Jack.

Fight Prep

Then masterchief passed down through Chief Booker to have Ens O'Reilly and him as well as the MWR officer show up for the next day's big morning briefing. Booker actually let him off a few watches and Jack scrambled around getting ready for it. He went straight to the Photog Mate, Matty, to whip up some slides on the double to project for the briefing. Then he got his best crackerjack out. For once he was glad he had changed ships, and no one remembered him there as the Sampaugita Club fighter and former Wog Queen! He then carefully prepped what he'd say – all about the sisters,

Well, the next morning they went to the big bay. The MWR officer intro'd them and he thought of Paul's words - they were true, for as he began to speak all nervousness left him and he stood tall and proud in his sharp crackerjack knowing all eyes were locked upon him. He was at the very heart of the ship!

Of course they'd be looking at Paul too, but maybe because it was that they all new Jack from the accident with Tommy and which had riveted their full attention, and were very interested in who was this guy involved in that thing and what was he trying to do and why - he could see this all in their faces as he showed them the slide show, and one of them even asked him and all he could say was: "For a friend." And several kind of grunt with satisfaction of understanding.

Another asked him where they'd hold it and they all shook their heads. Then Jack said: "I'll be getting signup sheets just outside the briefing room." And posted himself in a manner that they couldn't leave without signing up in front of everyone. Thus he got many more that day and bigger amounts, too, thank God.

While canvassing one of the F-4 squadrons, he came across Lieutenant Kelly, again, whom they'd launched quite a few times off the catapult, who'd MC'd wrestling matches at Purdue as a college job, who enthusiastically offered to help him MC the event when he found out it was O'Meara v Sanchez. He exclaimed "Wow! That's the fight I saw in Oceanside! Jack, this is going to be big!" And he personally got everyone in aviation interested in the big fight.

The MWR officer told Paul the next day that the big Ops Boss – CDR Greencastle would be clearing a side of the big hanger that day for their tourney – which meant moving jets aside! He was getting some high level cooperation on his side!

Jack had raised thousands of dollars already for the pot and in tickets "I'm not going to tell Chaplain Adams until it is over, what we're doing. I'm just going to let him know I'm doing

some small fund raising for him. It's going to be a very big surprise for him – and the nuns, too."

The next few days were very exciting and hectic for both Jack and Paul as they tried to pull it all off and still work a very hard job. Paul was the promotional end – printing all the flyers encouraging the taunting between Navy and Marines, pulling off the huge dramatic fight. Jack's end was the collection of the pot from the entire ship to go to the orphanage, the ring set up and just getting volunteers onboard to help out in some way.

The two boxers were set up exciting taunts – to swell the crowd's already huge interest and the Navy/Marine Corps rivalry. Interestingly Jack discovered that with the enlisted – the vast majority of ships company, rooted for O'Meara though he was a Marine. Lt.Sanchez being an officer became the villain. It helped that he was dark haired and wiry and fit the part. Being an Academy grad made him a 'blueblood' and when Jack slighly told just about all the enlisted around him, the crewe began to sway for SGT O'Meara, who, despite his size, had become the designated underdog and also because it was a rematch, a rematch making it to epic, shipwide proportions.

And Paul arranged for them to 'haze' each other in prominent places onboardship like the messdecks and the hangerbay after safety meetings.

[show it}

And finally the date was set – when they'd be far out on the Pacific and away from sub haunts and Red Fleet sorties – and before the entire ship's wildness was spent in crossing back south the line hazing. It was perfect.

The mission to collect funds brought him to the hidden corners of the ship, where few went like the junior sailors berth where he'd once had lived. He put on his worst dungarees and when the chiefs and LPO were in the big chiefs meeting and the off duty guys had a good game of spades going in the compartment he appeared suddenly behind them throwing the sign up sheet on the table right on top their cards.

"Oh shit, it's Jack again!"

"It's the loan shark!"

He grabbed Big Sammy Trundle from behind in a double arm bar "Give or I'll bust all your butts!" and they tumbled backwards off the table and rolled on the deck towards the hatch. And he had Sammy in an arm lock while he made bets with the entire compartment!

"Sign up or I'll break his arm!" and he pulled it taught.

"Go ahead and break it McCracken and then we'll sign up!"

"Sign up you buggers!" Sammy cried as Jack yanked it harder, but was laughing and all were laughing really hard and all were signing up!

And now he had a compartment with a hundred percent signup that not one division yet could boast of the entire ship, he got permission from the Ops boss to announce this on the 1MC and once everyone heard that it was the junior deck sailors had out performed all other divisions, the completion became hot between the divisions and Paul posted the results on the bulkhead in the gallies.

with the officers he'd station himself in a prominent way by their canteen and quote statistics to them.

He'd stand in line by dispursing and hit them up as they drew small amounts of pay "Oh No! It's 'Jack the-Collection-Agency!" and they'd flee until he'd pin them down.

"The Marine Airwing has given a hundred percent of their manpower!" He'd tell chiefs and above. "We gotta do better than the jarheads!" He made up at first amounts of officer versus enlisted and after a while had Paul help him calculate true percentages:

"The MarDet has given ninety three percent higher than Navy."

"Commander, Seaman Joe Poeton in steerage gave half last weeks pay and he's got three little girls to feed."

Fliers were printed with the two contenders facing each other fiercly, and distributed all over the ship.

"Gees, I'm a hustler, Paul!" he said showing him the figures on watch, which were amazing. Hundreds and hundreds had paid to see the fight first hand in the hangerbay, and it had sold out, and Jack had long books of bets tallied in his Navy-style canvass notebook, that he calculated on watch on the open sea to see the fight's true profitability, and the figures were staggering – if Sanchez won, they'd get twenty-thou, and if O'Meara won, the figure was twenty-five! Twenty-five thousand dollars raised!"

"I could buy a Porsche with this much!!!"

"Don't tell anyone of this staggering amount until the day of the fight."

"Yessir." And so he kept it all a secret."

It hit him in a sudden crunch that the deep grief of Tommy was gone when he was on mission, unbelievably. He wondered if

Tommy was watching over him from high above, helping him set right the course he'd made. And if Jack had been a tid bit more introspective, he too would have realized that the deep cravings for the drink were gone, as if they had never been there before.

The Big Fight

Jack had acquired some rock cassettes to play as the crowd gathered for the fight through the sound system and they played _____ as O'Reilly approached and climbed into the ring, he motioned to his rackmate, Rick, to dim the hangerbay lights and spotlight Reilly, who was in a striped vest – they'd improvised together from the signalmen's pennants. He walked to the center of the ring when the music came to an end.

"Thank you for coming, everyone! I would like to take a moment to remind you of why we are all doing this and introduce to you the guy who started it all! Please come up to the ring, Seaman Jack McCracken."

Jack noted that there was loud applause and cheers and was flushed with happiness at this! When he got up to the ring he looked down and saw the Skipper was there – sitting in box seats that they'd set aside as VIP section, with the XO and the Master Chief and the Ops Boss.

"Captain, XO, and Ladies and Gentlemen of the Kitty Hawk…" And they cheered. "I want you all to know that before the final calculations of the pot, so far, we have raised…" and he slowly glanced all around him in the hangerbay "TWENTY FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS!"

They cheered loudly and he yelled over that "You did that Kitty Hawk!"

The full glory descended upon him as they cheered and cheered!

"You did that Hawk!" he said again. "You did that!"

"We had just about one hundred percent contribution!" he looked down and the VIPs were astounded, their mouths hung open and they were glancing at each other in amazement, Jack noted as the rowd roared on.

"Folks, this is something like five dollars per hand! And we have a lot of hands, don't we, Hawk! So, let's all give ourselves a big hand for this!" he was workin' them, working them up into a frenzy for the fight!

"Guys, with all this we will be able to add fourty more beds, and new bathroom, showers and provide food for two years. Guys, that fourty more of *our* kids, *our* Amerasian sons and daughters that won't have to be ragpickers or street whores! You did that, Hawk! YOU did that!!!!!!"

They roared back!

Over the roar He said to the Skipper "Thank you, Cap'n for letting us do this for them!" and he nodded back.

"And now, to help me MC this fight is Lt Kelly of VPH134, Please come up to the ring, sir."

He was in his khakis and climbed in and grabbed a mike and "Wow, I tell you I am pretty excited to be here tonight, Jack!"

"Yessir, you told me that you actually saw these two fight before, tell me a little about that, sir."

"Well it went into extra rounds, because by decision it was a dead even tie." He turned to the crowd. "That means, folks these guys are pretty darn evenly matched!"

"Wow, cool…" he said as the crowd cheered.

"…and when they finally talled up the judges decisions, 'Fast Eye Eddie' – that's Lt Sanchez – won by a single point! So, I'm looking to see Sgt O'Meara really wants to even up the score tonight, folks."

"Tell us a little about these fighters, Lieutenant."

"Well, McCracken, what can I say about that! These are both two special forces guys – O'Meara is Force RECON and an underwater demolition expert and Lt Sanchez was a SEAL team commander. Both have seen extensive tours in Vietnam, way behind enemy lines, and I don't have to tell you that, basically we are seeing World Class Warriors here tonight!"

The crowd cheered this, realizing the high aspiration of the fight – *world class warriors* – it's going to be the fight to see - of a lifetime!

"Well, we should consider ourselves lucky to see them fight!"

"Oh, I agree, Jack, I agree!"

He had choose this guy well, he was a born sports announcer.

"How about we start this fight Jack!"

"Aye, Aye, Sir!" he cried and turned to the MC guy "Let the fight begin"

He pointed to Airman Cruz who hit the Music. It was *AC/DC:*

"For Those about to Rock! We sal--lute you!"

And out of a curtained booth came Lt Sanchez, with about ten other officers all clad in the same t-shirt and shorts.

"We sal-lute you! FIRE!"

They strode through the throng towards the ring. Lt. Sanchez danced around throwing tight punches and upper cuts as he danced towards the ring.

"Fire!" and the music finished with its ten big gun salutes. 'We sal-ute You! We sal-ute You! Fire! Fire! Fire! We Sal-ute YOU!'

[more]

Jack gestured Rick to dim the lights again, and this time the crowd was helping out as MarDet began chanting in the dark, joined by most of the rest of the crowd:

"O – Mear – Rah!"
"O – Mear – Rah!"
"O – Mear – Rah!"
"O – Mear – Rah!"
And Cruz hit the music – "Dreams" by Van Halen sang out

"Higher and Higher, than I'll ever fly!!"

And the huge fighter stepped out of the curtain ring with his gang of Marines with high-and-tights wearing red USMC Globe and Anchor t-shirts and they spot-lighted his journey to the ring, occasionally punching, but mostly he strode with forward with enormous presence and prowess and the Hawks's crew just loved it!

Higher and higher!
Than I'll ever climb!"
Higher and Higher...
Leave it all behind!"
"We belong
To the strong!
Alas this is what dreams are made of..

After O'Meara's strut to the ring, Paul stepped to the center of the ring, and the two fighters stepped up and began glaring at each other without backing down or even blinking. The music finished its iconic echo across the hanger bay.

"Touch gloves." Paul told them, and briefly went over the rules for the fight.

O'Meara popped to attention and put out a glove and Sanchez tapped it back.

"Ding!"

Suddenly they went from military bearing to warriors crossing through an invisisble line before them.

"Swoosh – swoosh." One could almost hear above the roar of the crowd as they threw exploratory punches to get their space for a minute or so, when out of nowhere a kick from Sanchez from left field hit the Marine on his side with a "Thwaaack" that could be heard above the crowd, and rebounding off the massive body armor of the Marine to the roar of the crowd.

"He's lethal with that kick!" someone was saying.

"He's got pin-point accuracy with his kicks. I've never seen anything like it!" said the MC.

"Yeah, but it didn't even phase O'Meara!" Jack said back.

More kicks and O'Meara began to dance swiftly around giving Sanchez a moving target, which Sanchez easily rotated to face.

Paul, too, was dancing on his feet to keep nearby the fight, occasionally pulling them apart when they got locked in a hold and: 'kept her legit, for the Skipper o' the ship.'

"Boom!" Sanchez got the first good strike in – a lefty to the face which sunk deep into the jawline turning O'Meara's head and even drew a smattering of blood. And then two more to the target zone and O'Meara was bleeding even more!

"Show me some real fighting, Jarhead!" Sanchez yelled.

"Aye-Aye, Sir." And "POW!" O'Meara hit him with a right hook in the chin.

"Ohhhhh!" the crowd called.

Then they danced around each other in a kind of intermission for taunting:

"Come on MA-Rine!"

"You've gotten cooked in the Boiler Room, Sir!"

"You've gotten cooked low-crawling in the galley, O-*Mear*-rah!"

"You being eating too much wardroom cake, Your soft, sir!"

He jabbed him but O'Meara could move. "Strike one!"

"Shut-up!"

"Whoosh!"

"Strike TWO!" the seargeant said.

And Sanchez was mad now and unleashed a Sanchez-Jujitsu roundhouse kick and he went on the warpath now!

Attack! Attack! Attack!

Tora! Tora! Tora!

Sanchez was like a helo now fists flying, all connecting and a fist – foot combination …

But O'Meara swiftly grabbed the ankle, twisting it and 'Boom!' Sanchez landed on the deck on his back, O'Meara flew down upon him raining blood upon him, grabbing the leg with all his might and moving Sanchez around on the floor and was going for the 'Dead Man's Lock' hold, but Sanchez easily twisted out of it with a kick and tumbled around and a second later they stood both up and they were boxing again, when "Ding!" the first round ended!

They both went back to their corners where their chosen coaches dabbed them and screamed coaching directions and motivators at them.

Jack and Lt Kelly popped back onto the ring "Whatta you think of that sir!"

"It did not disappoint me at all! I mean, this is what we all came here to see, this caliber of fighting!"

"Whatta d'ya think of that Hawk?" Jack screemed and the crowd roared back to him.

"I think we're gonna have an epic match here tonight!"

Paul held up a hand and Rick hit the bell. "Ding!"

“Okay, Hawk, here we go again!” Lt Kelly said and they exited the ring.

Now the blood was boiling already and Lt threw a punch from last week, and again went deep into the jawline of the Marine, but as he was rebounding from it, O’Meara startled the crowd by throwing a left hook which connected to the wily Sanchez cheek!

“Wow!” Kelly screemed by Jack’s side. “I didn’t know he could do that!”

But again the warpath and Sanchez exploded: Punch-Punch-Poof! and Kick-Kick-Roundhouse - Kick-Punch-Punch!

He was not a human this SEAL team commander! The crowd roared – many envisioning him in the rice paddies, where he’d got his Navy Cross!

Ah! What he must have done to get that! When such bravery and courage were everyday work for SEALS – shoot, just their daily bread and a commute, why, Sanchez had earned the Cross! My my!

O’Meara was so besieged that for a few seconds his arms covered his face in total defense and the crowd booed him loudly.

But before anyone knew it he had uncoiled from this and charged Sanchez like a bull his arms out and with his massive weight he knocked Sanchez down and was upon him, pinning him down. And had him him a deathly grip that the wily Sanchez could not twist out of nor punch out of – When “Ding!” the second round bell ended this perfect hold.

“We’re seeing some great wrestling here tonight!” Jack said into the mike to Kelly.

“Let’s remember who were seeing! We’re seeing two special forces clash!”

“Yes that’s right, Sir!” The drama of the fight was building into epic proportions. “I mean, we have guys here that fight for real! They fight for the kill in real life!” the crowd roared. “How many of the professional fighters can say that they have done this -- for real in Vietnam, guys!” the crowd roared “None! I think we’re all pretty darn lucky to see this fight, Hawk!!” and Jack was flushed because this epic fight was all his own inception, along with Paul.

They exploded and the MarDet incited a chant and ship’s company joined in:

“O – Mear – Rah!”

“O – Mear – Rah!”

“O – Mear – Rah!”

Cruz rang the bell and out the fighters danced again throwing wild punches that didn’t connect. The MarDet incited a chant:

“Kay – OH!”

“Kay – OH!”

“Kay – OH!”

But the two well trained fighters stuck to their fighting strategies and resisted the urge to fly-in punches from the Yellow Sea.

And O’Meara threw a kick that flew Sanchez backwards and the Marine began his charge to drive the SEAL team commander to the deck, where he probably could have outwrestled anyone in the world!

But Sanchez with the maneuverability of a Sikorski Knight Hawk side-stepped this charge and O’Meara flew past him like a jet whose tailhook that had missed all three lines on the flightdeck, and he tripped and landed on the deck on his knees.

Now Sanchez could attack him from above as O’Meara fell to his knees and was trying to get back up under this onslaught!

The clock was down to one minute!

Now on the ground O’Meara being kicked savagely by his opponent and managed to low-crawl over and somehow grabbed the flying dancing feet of Sanchez with his massive arm strength and had tripped him and covered in blood he pulled the arms around Sanchez’ neck and suddenly with a swiftness so unseen, he crawled around Sanchez’ back, he had an armbar around Sanchez’s neck and the officer seemed to be turning a little blue and faint when he tapped the deck, signaling surrender.

Paul jumped swiftly between them heavily pulling off O’Meara and ended the fight!

The full roar of the crowd lasted many minutes while O’Meara stood up, very bloodied and strutted around the stage in victory! While the Sanchez woozily got up to his feet.

Next to Marine Boot Camp graduation, and when he’d been frocked with his golden Reconnaissance wings, it was one of the highest, most epic moments of his Sean’s life and as the glory of the fight descended upon him, as the roar of his ship sounded all around him, Sean did remember to give thanks and with his hands and face up he lifted up high and he could see out the hangerwell elevator that the sun was streaming in through the clouds. “Thank you.” He cried. “Thank you!”

With the fighters there Jack, Paul and Lt Kelly stood in the ring and Jack held the mike up to Paul:

“The winner by Choke-Hold “SEAR-GEANT SEAN O’MEARRRRA!” and they lifted his arms up high as the MarDet incited a Chant again:

“O – Mear – Rah!”

“O – Mear – Rah!”

“O – Mear – Rah!”

They chanted and again:
"O – Mear – Rah!"
"O – Mear – Rah!"
"O – Mear – Rah!"

And Lt Kelly gave him a belt they Machinist-Mates had improvised from various brass plates soldered together, which had in the anvil shaped figure of the USS Kitty Hawk upon it.

Lt Sanchez with excellent military bearing extended a hand to his contender – the Hawk roared with approval of this chivalrous move and they shook and many pictures were took by the Photog Mate.

"Thank you Jack!" Sean yelled, leaving off his rank altogether and shaking his hand as the JOs snapped their pictures together.

An Hour later Jack was still directing clean-up. Funny, he was just a Seaman and yet he was getting everyone moving though they were just about all ranked higher than him! And now he realized why he had so loved being out to sea – his entire brotherhood was always all around him, aboardship and they had believed in him, with his cause and *they had all followed him* becoming his brethren and family when he had had none. The betrayal of his last ship seemed to be forgotten.

The Master Chief of this vast world of a ship, stood on the flying rail overhang overlooking all this to make sure the clean-up and squaring away of the birds was happening, and was surprised to find it mostly done – why, everyone was bustling around McCracken, who directed them – even the officers. It was one of the more amazing things he'd ever seen at sea and he had been a long time watcher of people, too. Over the next few days he would see the ship slip subltly under the spirit of the kid – he was a born leader and Master Chief muttered to his assistant, Chief Derby: 'Let's get that guy a stripe."

Jack couldn't sleep that night before watch. He wouldn't even try! He just went to the taffrail where he stood alone and watched the sun sink into the Deep, something most mysterious, but wonderful had been returned to him, and alas he had some peace.

Paul got a letter of commendation for his fitreps and The *Navy Times* had interviewed him and Paul two days later on the ship-to-shore phone, Paul and the fighters, about why he was really doing all this work – having modestly telling the reporter that it was for his lost comrade and service for AA.

And in that they'd reckoned in him they had a star arising - he had a heartening kind of celebrity in this stunning admission of humility. And that's where the legend of Jack had begun to spread across the Western Pacific.

And chief ordered Jack to his office:

"McCracken, be sure to have your best crackerjack and report to Captain's Mast at 1300."

"Captain's Mast!!??" he gulped. He was in trouble once again!! Tommy's death had finally caught up to him in all the celebrity he had just gained! "Why, Chief!!" he croaked.

"I don't know!" Chief snapped. "Get a move on it. You have one hour."

Had the money gone astray somehow? What were they accusing him of again?? He poured over and over every scenario in his head as he stood in the companionway in the long line with all the loosers facing mast that week. He had placed that check in Disbursing Department's hands, himself! He had called Chap himself on the ship's phone to insure he'd received it. What could have possibly gone wrong? It was then he remembered the lost mast of poor Tommy. His shame had finally caught up with him! No matter how hard he tried, his life seemed to be one endless line of F*ck-ups! He was a curse to his own life! He was about to give up completely. Even his best efforts were not enough to loose the curses upon his name!

He heard the Captain of the Ship was ordering: "Seaman McCracken, Front and Center." Bravely he left-faced and marched on in to the skipper's office and stood stiffly at attention in front of his desk, with as much dignity as he could muster. He at least could say he had born his great shame with that! As the Skipper shuffled with the paper and read his name, he would always remember that one lesson of dignity in the very face of Shame and complete defeat!!

"…For Leadership and Conduct above and beyond the call of duty…"

Meritorious Mast! He was getting his crow!!

He gulped deep and blinked heavily as his eyes became awash in water. He had never imagined he would *ever* get his crow! He never imagined he'd be worthy to have a career in the Navy itself! And more! The Skipper said the letter of commendation had come straight from ComSevenFlt himself!

The skipper read the award alound, but Jack was hearing Chaplain Adam's voice crying out, from the pulpit in Olongapo a year ago, reading Isaiah instead:

"If you pour out your heart for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted... then shall your light arise in the darkness and your gloom will be as noonday..."

Insert for more ops, ships histories

A good break for ships histories, UNREPS, etc to get more action to break up all the glory Jack just got. Now there are more troubles – the way of the Sea – and this breaks up all the glory he just got. Jack needs to struggle more.

Also he got mail from his cousin in San D - Flo, Molly, Tim telling him to stay with them anytime he liked. Very good idea.. really only family he had, have except this floating box called the Kitty Hawk.. just realized the Hawk was the only home he'd had since living in Bremerhaven, Germany. And his cousin Tim told him that his father has been promoted to master of the ship and he is again somewhere sailing out in North Atlantic Trades. Last time he'd seen that old man was dusting him off himself in the airport curb in Hamburg, Germany.

Liberty in Sydney, Australia

23 MAR 77
Pier Tango [research]

"Every Sailor should have a Sydney..."

After six months to see on heavy ASW ops – chasing the Russian subs all over the Pacific in conjunction with P3 Orions – the Carrier group was overdue for R&R and a port call to Sydney was an amazing event as to ever to be seen. Each sailor had heard stories like motorboats speeding alongsides and throwing six packs of beer into the hanger bay or helicopters doing a flyby with girls flashing them. And the seagods favored them unbelievably with a Sydney Port Call and yet it was to here the ship took our newly sobered Jack.

A little voice was whispering all along as Port Section moored the ship and tied off her lines and put down the gangway, sounding a bit like Chap's voice '*careful there, Jack – whatcha gonna do on liberty call? Are you going to drink, Jack?'* And he didn't have an answer, nor would he. How could he?

The pre-call came over the 1MC as he was at his rack putting on his crackerjack and neckerchief with Rick and his buddies made his way to the quarterdeck where he section was mustering:

"Liberty! Liberty! Starboard side Liberty!"

As they bounded down the quay they was a large crowd lined up to see them and their ship - of five thousand girls!

When they stepped out the gangway a scream erupted like they were rockstars! As they walked down the road nice blonde Aussie girls were grabbing sailors and kissing them as they departed and screaming out 'Go to the Mariners Tavern Yankee!! And the chief bravely lead the section to a bar within a mile and Jack found himself later that liberty sitting in a rollicking bar full of partying shipmates and local girls, perhaps he'd be trying to get away with just sipping on a beer or two – he'd guessed, trying to keep sobriety somehow and still fit in.

He felt his new chief's eyes upon him and others too, stole glances – what would Jack do? But most of the boys were of the Drink! Drink! Drink! sort and Jack felt the pressure hard as they obliviously carried on.

After a while two flatmates noticed him from afar, waving to him across the room.

"Frickin McCracken." Grumbled Garnet to the chief.

"You're just jealous." Observed the Chief.

"Well he always steels the show." Said Garnett, who had like the brunette girl, Angie.

"I can imagine." Said the chief sympathetically. And on top of it, the guy didn't even seem to try, the girls just flocked to him – and as if to confirm this theory of the chiefs a large mug of beer appeared before McCracken - courtesy the two girls.

"Hey, luv" said the waitress who'd put the mug of ….down in front of him and her bosom was on his shoulder as she was leaning over him pointing "From those two girls over there!" And the whole table of twenty guys from his section broke out in cheers!

McCracken had looked over and he saw not just one, but two very attractive girls smiling at him – one blonde, one brunette. And chief saw he looked and his whole gang was cheering him on – apparently forgetting about his whole story in the beer gush!

"Well, Jack!" they urged. And chief saw he looked to Rick, but Rick had already found a girl named Lisa, and she was already sitting on his lap.

"Hey, McCracken, you don't have to drink it – I'll help you with it!!" yelled Petty Officer Angelo reaching for his mug.

"Oh shit." Jack said grabbing it back and gulping. "Well, just perhaps only on Liberty." He told himself, and he upturned the mug upon his lips to the great cheers of his gang.

It hit his stomach with an explosion of fire!

And he was instantly and terribly drunken once again! He felt so warm and good! God! He loved this drink! He—loved—to--drink! He felt so fine! Oh there was nothing wrong in his world – Jacks World! All was right now! He could control it! He loved to drink – ahhh - as he loved The Nav, it was as simple as that. He looked around to the rolicking comradeship all around him. Some were singing, others were were hanging onto each other for photos and swaying in revelry – they were his brethren at his sides - ah… it was… what was this thing that they sung of? Of that they swayed in?? He took a fiery gulp more. He was shining now in it, whatever it was. And reigning in it, whatever it was… he was laughing a bit at the giddy thoughts that came and there was then only one word for it -- it was, alas – GLORY!

Glory he felt to belong in this faraway place with *all* his comrades at his sides and girls at his beck. It was Glory of the Sea Service – with all the Tradition and Revelry, bought with the many hardships at sea; and finally he found, as drunken as he was, it was Glory of the Sea herself, as he had always known. *Poseiden and his trident arising and mermaidens swum charm all*

around his intoxication, spellbound - He was taking it all in… … it was all Glory overdue - and he took a gulp more.

He caught the cute blonde waitress's eyes and she smiling delivered him a mug in front of him again. "Thanks, Luv." He smiled and she smiled and he drank it straight down feeling the fire in his belly again and over to their table he swayed, again as all his shipmates cheered him on.

He stood over them just smiling.

"Hi there, sailor!" The blonde one said in her neat down under accent.

"Care to join us?"

And he nodded and plopped down between the two. "I'm Jen." Said she and he gulped when he saw her beautiful tan bosom before him; and she threw her head back and laughed.

"And I'm Angie." He swayed over as the world spun and he saw the sharp, green-eyed brunette who was touching his arm.

"Cat got your tongue?" said Jen.

"Nope." He managed still smiling.

"Well you got a name, Yankee?"

"Just Jack."

"Just-Jack, you have a noice smoile."

"Thanks."

"What do you do on ship?" the brunette asked and he turned to answer dizziness hit him.

"I'm a QM."

"Whut's that?" the blonde asked and he swayed to her.

"Navigation and weather."

"How cool. How impurtant." They both cooed.

"Right." And all he could do was smile.

A short while later Rick looked up just in time to hear the gang at the table cheering Jack, who was leaving the pub, swaying between both girls. Chief had before liberty told him to stay with Jack, saying "Any trouble Jack gets in will be double for you!" and he said "Oh, I Have to go! Hey come with me Lisa-girl!"

She giggled and he pulled her hand and they left the pub and ran down the street to catch up with Jack and the two girls.

Jen unlocked the flat and they all fell in to the rooms like a tangle of lovers.

Sometime after midnight, Jack remembered Rick shaking him and then dousing him with water."Oh Jack! We've got to run! Liberty's almost up!!!" and then he was puking in the toilet, and Rick was wiping his face like a mother and throwing on his jumper and neckerchief. He was still so very drunk. And he glanced down to see the two girls asleep under the sheets, where

he'd been between them and couldn't remember a thing of which took place there.

"Jack! Let's go! Let's go!"

And now they were running down Sydney's port streets – desperate to save their careers. He could hardly breathe and threw up on nearly every corner, but Rick screamed and screamed at him until he ran more, in a blur, but they made it to the bridge in time, the run having sobered them up some. And The face of the OOD came sharply into focus for Jack. It was the face of Lt Forsyth who'd given two hundred bucks for the tourney and he was looking at Jack with disgust turning into contempt.

"Oh Rick, take me to the shed before any more brass see me!" and Rick led him down and down and a round and round the multiple ladders that took him the deck where to a welding supply room they'd found one time on another caper – where the stoners kept their weed - and Rick shut Jack in it for eight hours.

"Let's get some chow in you Jack." Said Rick unlocking him to find Jack passed out very hungover and covered in grime. "But, First a shower."

And then they lined up at the galley – it would have to be tuna casserole – some the mess chief had a sick sense of humor, but he'd soon chuck it back to the sea, and he left and found himself in the hanger bay, leaning over wretching, while some guys were laughing at him in the background of the hangerbay.

It suddenly struck him – that he was back in the battles once again! Indeed *her* curse had followed him even to this remote place on the other side of the world, so far, far away from that estuary in Germany.

As he vomited off the side of the ship – as she had - he was there again, the memory in Germany replaying so loudly in the theatre in his head that he could not shut it off:

"I'm going to get some fresh air." She had said roughly and got out the passenger door, trying to light on in the wind as their ferry crossed the Weser River. Then she began to vomit off the gunwhale.

Before his ship left, his father had laid his hands on Jack's shoulders urging him: "Jack your mother's really drunk again, watch out for her tonight! Don't let her out of your sight for one second, Jack!" And so he got out too to stand by her when, momentarily he caught sight of the giant containership crossing the bow of the ferry and he paused momentarily at the back of the car to glance at it lit peach by the sunset, it was a magnificent ship…

The ferry began to hit the containership's wake he looked over and she had vanished!

He ran around the car in a terrible panic and he screamed in German he screamed repetitively “Meine Mutter ist unterfallen! Unterfallen!” He ran to the bridge screaming at the crew, and they immediately turned the ferry northward as the giant river flowed into the North Sea. The captain radioed the Wasserpolizei and Jack screamed and screemed overboard. And all the passengers got out of their cars and were looking. For hours they zig-zagged the ferry and choppers which flew all over the Weser River that night, but she was never seen again.

Two men of the Polizei came to him at midnight and found him in the ferry office doubled over, rocking and weeping - his hands on his temples pressing them. They looked at each other: He was tearing his hair out in grief.

“Kom, Yack.” They tried to tell him.. “Zu Hause.” And they grabbed his forearms lead him hunched over weeping into the polizei car. People on the street huddled each other together muttering to themselves seeing that “Was ist los?”

And they had kindly driven him a few blocks over to their flat that night and taking his keys they opened it for him, “You okay?” they had asked in halting English.

“Nein.” And, ‘Danke’ he thanked them and waving them off he bid them “Nacht.”, and closed the door quickly on them. Reluctantly they left the doorway and he’d immediatley found her real hard stuff that night, hidden under the sink – with the Draino. He must have gone into her room for the next morning he found himself on the cold floor outside her door with her wedding ring strung on his necklace around his neck. And they came by in the next three days, he thought, for he was so drunk he could scarcely remember anything.

And he was drunk for days and days while they flew his father from his ship already in the middle of the Atlantic back to Bremerhaven, where he’d found Jack slovenly drunken, lying in his own varmint on the floor of their flat saying “Why you didn’t watch out after her Jack!! Why, because you were daydreaming? I told you to watch out after her! I told you plain as Damn day!!”

He began to weep in front of his father on the floor “God! Please stop!”

“Look at yourself now, Jack! You’re nothing but a drunk Jack! My son the damn drunk! You’re nothing but a drunk!”

“OH!” he cried on the floor.

Then, furious at himself for loosing it, again, Henry grabbed Jack by the collar, and yelled at him to pack a few clothes and pushed him into the BMW he’d bought his mother and then he roared at a hundred miles an hour on the Autobahn to Hamburg. Jack had passed out the whole way against the windshield and when he woke up he found himself at the airport’s curb woozy and hung way over and stunned to be in Hamburg, where his father drug him in to Lufthansa desk – cussing him the whole time - and grabbed him and walked him to the gate for a plane bound to DC where his brother Eric, would then pick him up and put him into a detox program in Norfolk, Virginia.

But in DC he had sobered up and switched flights himself and went to his cousin’s house in San Diego, California, instead. And a week later Jack had immediately joined the Navy and *had put his father and brother to his lee. Without a second of consolation more, he left for The Nav and was taken by the Sea.*

Sober Liberty with Friends

After that first Sydney liberty Jack's reputation and popularity with his shipmates either soared or plummeted – depending on whether one was jealous or admiring of him. He swore when someone brought it up which made him seemingly untouchable in his humility in this and some guys really were admiring him for not instituting complete and total bragging rights about it. The others just grew green with hatred until they saw that he, too, could give a damn about the matter, and in that he got such an admirable rep of 'Lovin-em-and Leavin-em-Jack'. Really only Rick, and the Chief who had an eagle's eye for human behavior – knew the truth of his wretched fall. The rest just fell under the legend of Jack that was growing everywhere he went: The Legendary Sailor – *angel to the orphans – but with a girl or two in every port!!*

He tried to push Tommy out of his mind – that he'd fallen so off the wagon for the entire ship's company to see!!

So he posted little Molly a stuffed Kangaroo, he'd bought nearby and kept busy with ship's duties and courses.

Two days later a few sailors got a few hours liberty again, and Sydney found Jack and Rick surreptiously meeting Paul in a little restaurant away from port. Now this was wonderful for Jack for they all agreed beforehand to not drink and he found himself having a wonderful time, too! Everywhere the three sailors went people came up to them like they were celebrities, where were they from, what did they do, and 'Welcome dewn oonder, mite'.

"I love the Navy." Paul was saying after all this. "I would never have been able to see all this… and he was talking of the great continent of Australia, the great Outback and of Perth, Darwin, Christchurch and Tasmania… last WestPac cruise he had toured them all.

Jack had earlier found Jen's number crumpled up in his wallet and he dared to call her up from the restaurant and she was very pleasantly surprised and came right out to meet him with Paul and Rick.

Everyone was so happy that **long ago afternoon in Sydney**, so **far away,** there he was with his girl and his two best friends, at home, 'Down Under' comfortable in their company, completely unenvious of Jack, they told story after story to Jen, who laughed with the giggles of a shore-girl listening to sailors when they spoke of the sea.

"Here's to my friends Paul and Rick." Said Jack, toasting with his soda. "The best kind of drink to have."

"Jack?" Jen asked him aside. "Are you an alcoholic?"

"No!" he snapped, suddenly quite tense, and then he took some deep breaths and tried to calm down, patting his chest for cigs he'd thrown away six months ago, then, laughing he turned and he whispered and blew into her ear "Actually, I've turned into a sexaholic."

And she giggled "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. Especially after last liberty." He said "and you two both brought me home."

"That was terribly naughty of us." She said, giggling.

"Where's Angie, anyway?"

"At her boyfriend's house."

"Oh, shoot."

She giggled at his shot-down pride."It's just me now."

"Really?" he said smiling hungrily. He didn't know it, but when he looked at a girl like that his eyes dilated like a cat's and few girls could resist him, ever. He was never a man to hunger for attention and love and affection, for as lost as he was, they had always loved, him, the girls. They yearned for him, for his wild lost heart that could never be theirs. There was a mystique about sailors, the mystique of the forlorn sailor, looking out to sea.

Later he went alone to her flat and asked him the question plaguing him for days "Jen? Did we do anything at all that night?"

"You den't remember? Was Oy that bad?"

"So we did do it then?"

"Oy'll never tell." She said coyly, fingering her lips with her long nails and her accent made it even more so.

"Now come on Jen, don't play with me. I blacked out and I can't remember anything about that night!"

"Gees, you are an alcoholic, aren't you?" she said, trying to break him down and know him, the mystery of his ways.

"Now don't you start!' *the very idea of that*! "I guess we did do it then?"

"You don't remember me doing this?" and she was stroking his mermaid tattoo.

He laughed and said "Do it some more and I'll remember some more."

And then he looked across the room at the stuffed kangaroo then it came back to him, most terribly: he'd gotten so sick and had thrown up on the kangaroo and she had cleaned it up while he had passed out holding the other girl, Angie.

"Geez, what a terrible lover!" He'd had the dream of a threesome and he'd been to slovenly drunk to even do one of the girls! "Geez, what a lush!" he said, sitting down, terribly embarrassed for himself and his backwards slide into the gutter.

"It's all right Jack, It's just a disease, that's all. No one looks down on you if your diabetic, you know. It's the same way. Your body just can't handle alcohol, not sugar."

"Geez." *The preachers were all at it again - always reminding him of his love affair with the looming shadows.*

"It's all our fault, Jack. We shouldn't have brought you that Fosters. You just looked so lost then."

"I hadn't had a drink in ___ months."

"I know, Jack. I heard. We're to blame."

"Geez, everybody seems to know about me." *Y'know hon' I'd like to keep my head buried in the sand…*

"Yeah, and we all heard about your ship did for that orphanage and why you were doing all that for AA."

He layed down in agony and put up his hands to his head.

"What Jack?" she said cuddling up to his chest.

"I hate that everybody knows all about that! I was just trying to help them." *And because of them now everybody knows what a drunk I am!*

"It's okay, Jack, we both thought it was great of you."

"I just get a big kick out of helping people, that's all," *it's just an antidote for the cravings - the seventh step* - I didn't want all this… admiration… "I'd like to just have a drink or two IN PEACE!"

But One can never just have one drink or two - or so the twelve-steppers said. Dang! He cringed and craved a drink even more now.

"But we still think it is great of you, what you've done."

"Whatever!"

He looked around.

"What Jack?"

"You got any beer?"

"No, Jack. I don't have any alcohol."

"Let's go get some."

"No Jack. All the stores are closed now."

He cringed. He was really tired now, tired of his own self, tired of his own excesses, tired of being his own foe…

He was rubbing his eyes, she smiled, just like a little kid.

"I'm just really tired, Jen."

Gosh I just want to hold her a little and rest here until liberty is up.' he thought and turned her over snuggled up tightly to her back and he buried his nose deep in her curly blonde hair at the nape of her neck "Let me sleep here, Luv." He told her drozily.

"Oy foind that vory attractive about you – helping the lost." She said turning over and looking into his eyes – a fish taking the bait again, and, oh God, he was just so very tired;

and wanting none other than the utter banishment of deep sleep that was always so denied him! He was still cursed!

He looked at her and sighed and she was all over him before the minute had passed.

The last day in port found Jack on the bridge on watch as they cast the carrier off: The Boatswains swung their gaint mallets to remove the chocks on the chain and the capstan wound the anchor up to the bow eye. The linehandler were now on detail all around the ship as orders to cast off from the JOOW came and he felt her gently move off the quay.

From the bridge He spied Jen’s big blonde hair from a far and he knew she was aching him to come back – it seems that they all did, but he was just thankful to be leaving her kind of captivity – enticing as it was - and he knew then, that he’d never see her again.

*THE CYCLONE

238 Nautical Miles out of
Huytyjiska,Kamchatcka
21 Dec 84

What is it with the Sea,
I do not understand,
How She takes a boy,
And makes him a man?'

And now there were deep again on the high seas, and storm tossed; twenty days out of Luzon TAD on a frigate "USS Klondike, when came the cyclone season called only in the Westpac and IO the terror-striken term 'typhoon' when seas rose up in their fury, tantrum ship sinking pounce furious teetering upon enmaddening seas, they hopscotchers timed the bow to pierce between the culls - but though they could slip 'tween cyclones they could not outrun the ever encircling wavetrains which the fetch travelled the entire oceans to crash their fury upon shores of distant lands in a vast concentric ripples o' twenty footers crashing green water over flight decks – a penance for their shortcuts – for, though the could dodge the storms, there were no outrunning the wavetrains.

And sailors fought during times of peace, fought for their lives to stay on deck and not become a casualty of a war called Sea.

And thus seafaring hadn't change much since the Phoenicians though endless drills special SAR ops there still were the this one thing - out to sea a sailor fallen is almost cut off as an man is on the moon with no net to catch a careless foothold upon the deck. So if you'd say a *rosary for those to outcast to the sea, say*: *Oh, pray to the saints in the heavens for a careless sailor, lads.*

And now with the Reds in the Aleutians – trawlers in the blasts of artic seas Jack's boat was sent up to the furious, ferocious Northern seas and he became an artic sailor man.

It was another storm – A Siberian Low – to add to their books, and he was on watch on the bridge and the girl would dip her long nose into the troughs as she made a run for the dark, gothic seas.

"Gale Center Warning" they had posted on the CIC.

They could strap themselves to their posts and hang on for hours and hours – four hours at a post. They strapped themselves in their racks like seatbelts. Chow? Was a mess, if you could

eat it. And sailors as in times of old, became skinny, canny storm creatures in the deep of the storms. But, alas, the guys on watch on the bow, and breaches, alas they had it rough!

They were in their Winter Blues now, and wearing their long Naval Overcoats on the bridge, and the deepened moist maritime air smooched their cheeks rosey red and tricked their earlobe into numbness. They passed by Japan and Korea an up the forbideen and hidden Russian coastline, Siberia, Kamchatchka, Vladivistock.

They'd slid by icebergs up there – most carefully and his eyes grew wide. "Iceberg at eleven o'clock!"

"Iceberg at eleven!" they chanted back.

"Hard to Starboard!" The JOOW ordered.

"Hard to Starboard." All on the bridge cried. And the petty officer swung the helm around.

He kept the binoculars up, with vigilance,lest a shoal of sub merged ice creep up to them. Their shipmates brought up scalding coffee to them, which they sipped as they clung to the bridge and held their constant vigil. Four hours at watch creeped by like days at sea, and they stripped their coats and boondockers and fell into the racks, for four hours of sleep!

And then the artic sun in summer how lit the skies and the darkness did not come for a month and then one did it did and one of his buds came and pulled him out of his rack – the aurora borealis ribboned over their ship that night under the sea's stars. Could this life be real, this life he was living? Was it a real thing that was happening to him? And he forgot his woes and found his way under the stars of the seas, he was only a but sailor once again.

The years passed on the long haul, on the open seas and before the winds and seaswells and the many ports-o-call in Asia. And liberties they had to walk far down the long piers into port and town for a drink and a girl, and a sailor developed a stride in port – a very recognizable walk anywhere they went – a rollicking swaying, wayward stride, with a lot of the luck of the seas and some swagger it in, and because the boondockers they issued had a big heal a sailor really had to step out in long swaying strides, wherever they went and – my! my! with pride. They were all so skinny and cocky crackerjacks and they rollicked the skirts everywhere they went and there was always trouble, and fights and love and lust, and could they help it? For:

Trouble, indeed double'r

On the tack, for a
Long-legged sailor
Like our Jack…

And they could be so savage and fought and paradoxically wink a green eye and under the curl girls all fell again and again. And they were hated and held and followed and beloved, they were larger than life… ah… that was the fleet back then. Forgive me, friends, for my excesses, for they had been *my* drink…

Life on Overseas Shore Duty

Subic Bay, Philippines

After this tour on the USS _____he found himself ordered back to his second home after Germany – Subic Bay, Philipines, for a three year shore billet. This he looked forwards to, he seldom got a land tour overseas and this was a big break from the very seafaring Quartermaster rate, he would be subbing as a Career Counselor Assistant.

Now, though it was a 'wuss' job – not on the flight deck or bridge at all, but, darn, he was good at it! Eventually he moved up to Second Class – QM2 – and got others to do the long tedious typing, but with his skills with people he got the job done well without the terror he'd once felt by being away from the ship.

He had once an informal chat with his old Master Chief Bangor about this little problem of his when he was about to be detailed off the ship and In short, it was a job designed just for him – in fact his former and BMCM Bangor had recommended him to the detailers for the job, himself!! *It's not what you know, but who you know…*

He had many plans for the orphanage – all of which were fun for him, by now he had developed a big passion for them, it's true, he thought, but he also had a lot of fun in doing all the charity events because he could always get a lot of guys to help out. And, he loved that, being a part of a big group that he led and he told himself that really he got more out of service than they did, he reasoned. But, then he had never known the hopelessness that the orphans had known either. And in this he had become their shining star - and they had become his rum.

And of course, he had many Filipinas at his beck and one pretty blonde petty officer, Rosy McCoo he managed to keep in tow spanning for their many tours thereafter, across the globe in the far-flung cities: San Diego, Manilla, Bahrain, Christchurch, Bangkok and Norfolk.

A year passed like that in peace for our wayward sailor, Jack. And he helped sailors in their careers and processed coursework, for guys all around town. He took several long tours to Oceania all around, with some with Rosy and others with his many friends, and he had managed to not get in even a lick of trouble! Now, he was a Second Class and working on up to first, and it was looking like he could make a career of the Navy after all.

Navy Nurse Amanda

About a year later he went to sickcall – he'd turned his ankle in a softball tournament on base he'd set up for the charity and he had hobbled on it to sickcall the next morning when he couldn't walk on that foot and sat in the little compartment aft of the lobby.

The nurse – a buxum lieutenant named LTjg Derby – Amanda Derby came in the room and began to take his vitals.

"It's my foot, not my arm, Ma'am." He teased as she took his blood pressure.

"Well I have to take your vitals, Petty Officer McCracken."

"Last time I checked, I'm still alive." He said putting his two fingers to his carotid and he broke out into a big smile.

She laughed, outfoxed, "Well, I'm glad to hear it!" She tried wrote down the numbers on the charter. "Let's see that foot now shall we?"

He gingerly undid his laces and pulled off his shoe and sock. His ankle was puffy and pale.

She pulled out the little tray. "Oh, nasty little sprain. We should get it X-rayed to make sure it's not broke."

"I don't think it is, but I can't seem to walk on it."

"I'll be right back." and she went out to arrange the Dr. Searson to look at it and set up an X-ray – and she thougth – 'I'm always so busy working, boy would I like to keep talking to that guy just for a few seconds more, she thought." And she went back in the room, ostensibly to get a pen. Just a few seconds more, she wasn't supposed to… it's called fraternization…

He was smiling again at her, reading her attraction like a thermometer. He was telling her how he got the sprain – on a tournament for the charity.

"Oh, you're that sailor that's helping all those kids!"

"Well we're sure trying to…"

"It's very wonderful what you're doing…" and Yak. Yak. Yak. Got that done with, OK, and now he said:

"To Be honest with you Lieutenant, we sure could use a good nurse to look in on them from time to time." He had said smiling ravenously. " They have very common ailments, diarrhea, worms, malnutrition – easy things to put right by a trained nurse. I sure wish we could get *a Navy Nurse* to volunteer to look over them." He said now, smiling, superconfident, by now, rather getting to first base already with her and, looking at him now, cute as can be, charming but very laid back, she decided to agree – it was for charity, afterall. She invited him over to her place that night – he was so cute, so laid back, so… easy going… it'd be relaxing and fun to help him and the orphans… And

well maybe there'd be a few cuddles in return – that was the extent of her physical thinking; for she was but a woman.

But at night, when he knocked on her door, her heart missed a beat when she opened it – he was very tall – she hadn't realized that for he was sitting the whole time in the clinic. And he was very impressingly so! He had a crutches with him, but it didn't stop him from being very impressive right from the beginning. In her mind he had gone from being like a lowly humble, young seaman into a distinguished Lieutenant Commander in her eyes. What a rush! And now, even with the crutches he had backed her up to her kitchen counter and planted one right on her lips, right from the getgo! And then he was laughing at himself and playing lightly with her hair.

Was it supposed to be like this? 'I mean,' she thought, 'whatever happened to courtship?'

"Jack," she said, with too much LtJg in her voice. "You're being a little too forward…"

"A little? Look, don't try to order me around, A-Man-da," he warned and boldly sat right down on her couch and made himself at home.

"You're just rather fresh, Jack."

"Let's get this straight - if you want me here I'm wearing the pants, got it?" and he smiled this statement into an oath!

She just looked at him in shock, not realizing the young second class she'd flirted with that day at sickcall had so much - *je ne sais qois* in him. In the back of her mind she had been picturing *eventually, probably* candles and maybe even some very illegal cuddling when she'd asked him over that night and now he was stood his ground with her like a fellow officer – a superior officer, even and the transformation was just amazing, she was falling under his spell already!

But, what could any girl do with that tall, tan, green-eyed monster before her?

They had the steak dinner she'd made and a long delightful conversation that ended late at night, and she had to be up at 0500.

"Come sit closer to me A-man-da." He demanded, but ever so charming and she was tumbling like Alice down the wishing well, falling under his spell. "My foots hurtin' darlin' come over here will ya?"

She sat there stunned.

"Well, I'm going back to the barracks then." He said starting to get up.

"Wait…" she hesitated. "This was kinda sudden that's all, can we not slow down some?"

"Nope." He said firmly, still going away, on his crutches to her door, still smiling.

"Awhh…"

"What's it gonna be, Amanda?" he said at her door, grinning so very completely sure of himself. It was rabidly intoxicating!

"Okay, Okay." She capitulated and then he laughed lustily – throwing his head all the way back and was full upon her on her couch and kissing her rabidly and through her -- and it was his way ever since.

Her mind spun for days at work as she struggled to do her endless charting at what had happened to her -- she had been… devoured.

A Home for Jack

She was wondering how soon it would end. But he kept calling her – *unlike all of the others* - and so they kept meeting, she thought it'd be gone in a matter of days, or weeks; but despite his drinking they were still a couple together for a month now! He began to spend most of his weekends with her. And she found that she was secretly and ravenously in love with him! And she; she could hardly breath at times, at work, when she thought of him; for, she could hardly handle him.

It was known to the other nurses and staff on the floor of the hospital where she served that she had someone special and secret for base events and parties she never brought her significant other, but spent long weekends gone on long trips with someone – a tall guy, they saw from a distance, once.

Her friends chatted with her in the hospital cafeteria at lunch when she told them about their upcoming trip to Hong Kong: 'The guys gotta be high ranking because she's so secretive about him!'

"He's not married then, is he??"

"Oh, God no!"

"He's a pilot, right?"

"No."

"A Submariner? Special Forces? How come we never meet him, Lieutenant?"

"Um, he's always gone to sea." She lied and they knew it.

If only they knew she was seeing a second class petty officer! But there was something high ranking about her lover – and so they were right - he was extraordinary in many ways and

then he was pure 'RegNav' sailor too in others – like occasional barfights in town, but then he'd tend to the orphans - he was both a rascal and a saint - a combination that tripped her up bigtime! And, she wasn't the only one.

Jezzy come to stay with them during these years and others asked her if this was Jack's illegitimate daughter, but, Amanda found herself getting fond of the kid who made her feel like she had a husband and a family and she too treated poor little Jezzy as a daughter.

She was picking up on Tagalog too, and that was something most Americans nurses couldn't do on base. But, after a few months of intense effort Jack and Jezzy could write and both talk to each other in both languages! It was just amazing. She was so proud of him, but she couldn't share it with anyone, for he was her topsecret love.

And there was this other tantalizing side that no one knew except those closest to Jack, that he was actually very quiet. He'd came home after PT and parked himself on the couch for football and baseball seasons, without single word said until five when he helped Jezzy with her homework or her, with her cooking and every so often he'd clicked his faraway eyes on her and she feel a thrill! And so the world was all well and that he was all cuddled up there in their little life together, forever. Amen.

[need more about their travels, occasional typhoons that hit the P.I, their parties, Jezzy etc]

Then after a year or so of this peace out there were the messiness about the Dream Sheet began.

The Dream Sheet

"You mean you're moving on without her?"

"Well…"

"You're just using her Jack." Tim was telling him on the Autovon line one day when he was discussing his next duty station with his cousin.

"Well if I am, at least I am trying to make her happy too."

"I can't give her forever, but I can give her right now."

"So, you're telling me that one day you're going to break her heart?"

He said nothing - guilty as charged. He hung his head.

"That's shitty of you."

"Well, at least I told her so."

"Jack, you're just a player, that's all."

"No, I care for her."

"Then marry her!"

Tim was right, of course, but Jack's heart sank into the abyss again and he heard himself loudly: "I can't, I can't I can't and -- I don't know why!!"

A few months later after they 'hooked up' Tim's sub had come to Subic Bay and he had arranged to take leave and come for a visit. Tim had just had his big breakup with his first wife and Jack had arranged for him to stay at Amanda's house – with her and Jack there for a few weeks while they were in town. And they had partied on the veranda facing the bay for days, commiserating to Jack about his wrenching divorce.

Amanda got along Jack's cousin and had a good opinion of him as well and Tim would have liked to have a crack at a Navy Nurse like this! It irked him so that the best women always had the worst of luck with his cousin and Jack never seemed to do things right with them! Yet, hear he had been a nice guy and his ex-wife was chomping down on his wallet like a barricuda!!

Tim had him over beers that week basking in the luxury of officer's country, trying to make sense of it all – through beer, of course.

"Gees, look at what you're going through Tim, I don't want any of that."

"Yeah, but Amanda's a class act. I don't think she'd rip you like that."

"There you go again, Tim - preaching."

"So, you don't love her, then?"

"No, it's not that, I care for her a lot."

"Well, then why not?"

He smiled enigmatically "I don't know."

Tim always got so mad at how his cousin went through women like Kleenex that his toes would curl inside his boondockers and he snapped out: "Look, this girl's gonna snag the very next HOT young Navy doctor that comes around!"

"I know." He said quietly.

"Well then why not let her next man be you? She cares for you, Jack."

"…" he shrugged.

"What is it then, the freedom issue again?"

"Yep, that's it, Cuz, I've just gotta be free, Cuz," he drawled on songlike, so annoying "I just gotta be free - to be me."

And in a few more beers the cousins were on the floor wrestling each other again; since childhood Tim had always won *these* matches.

She had thought he might, maybe not be with her forever – he'd secretly gotten his orders and hadn't told her a thing - she could never seem to stop his drinking – he'd party the entire weekend through but he hadn't cheated on her either that she knew of..it was a mixed bag. He held her all night long, they took many long trips together, and he loved kids. But, she longed for his heart – that the orphans had completely. But he usually made her happy if she forgot all that commitment stuff and was happy with what he could give her. If she pressed him about love or drinking he would end up gone all weekend and she'd find out later he was back in the clubs with the guys and that she could not bear, but she longed for forever, or whatever that meant. He'd told her plainly that forever wasn't for him and she'd got rid of him three times now – and took him back three times now! She was hooked. Now it'd been a year!

Soon they were off to Tahiti for a few days, or to a far flung island in the PI or Bali for fishing and sun bathing and she'd forget all this temporary stuff, he made the present so satisfying that even she could forget about the Dream Sheet and sometimes, once in a great while, she felt he too wanted it to last as well..it was tantalizing her and as time went on they stayed together like two perfect playmates in the sandbox of life and she didn't complain when things went bad or when he drank away the weekend on her sofa during baseball and football seasons.

Jezzy had been eyeing all of Loni's stethoscope and other medical gear for weeks and Loni had finally taken the kid to the Naval Hospital on base for a tour. She announced in plain English afterwards "I want be Doctor."

"Not a nurse?" Loni asked.

"Doctor help *more* people." She asserted.

"She doesn't mess around does she!" Loni said astounded at the seriousness of the little girl standing by the couch before her!

"She has known too much poverty to."

"All she can think of is helping people. It's astounding for her age."

"That's my girl." He said petting Jezzy's blonde hair affectionately and she hugged Jack.

"But, it's really hard to be a doctor."

Jezzy turned to her nodded seriously and Amanda rather gauged the girl understood already how hard, too. She was just amazing.

"It's also really hard to be a rag-picker." He said holding Jezzy now, kissing her head.

"Yes." She said toying with her stethoscope."It costs a lot to become a doctor." She said. "There are some realities here, Jack - she is an orphan."

"I'll start saving now." He told her quietly aside.

"How will you do that?"

"Well, I have almost a decade to do this, I'll throw some tournements and some investments over the next few years - but – it's lots of fun too." He twirled her hair around in his fingers; it was never work if you made it fun and got all the gang involved. It was a great party!

"Funny, you can easily make a major commitment to this little girl's schooling - but not to me at all."

"Do you always have to make it about us?"

"Do you always never have to make it about us?"

Near the end of his tour a lieutenant commander Markham on base had asked her out and he had said she should go out with him – no jealousy whatsoever! So, she went out, but all she could think of was that he was abandoning her soon.

The Doctor

During the last six months of his hitch He was having issues at home where there should have been none. He should be able to walk in the door and pop open a brew sit on the couch with her and watch The Chargers on AFN and not have to face a barrage of questions like: where were you, who were you with or even subltle questions probing him like what did you do for work today?

It's because I don't have your heart forever – you're going on the next duty station without me - she would say and then he'd be gone out the door and back to the room he kept in the barracks until she cried and had him back quicker than quick. I don't have your heart, why you torture me so?

He never could answer that one, because he knew he'd be caught like a fish on a line and then the terrible dread would descend upon him – again and again. But at least he had told her all along…

And so now there was this new thing: she was seeing someone else. He was due to PCS again – to ship out in three months and he had told her 'Okay, I can deal, you deserve someone better than me' and he let her go just like that. And he thought all was well, but one day he went down to the pier to visit his friend from Bootcamp Andres Godinez who's ship just came in the mine sweeper the USS_____ and he was talking to him while he was receiving mail across the brow to the JOOW and this senior officer - a Lieutenant Commander Markham – walks alongsides slowly.

'Attention on Deck!' someone called out and Jack turned around, right arm free and ready to salute, he saw this cold brown eyes, and the gold oak leaf on the collar he and the others all around popped tall and saluted but the commander just stood there and did not return their salutes as he must. He just kept the stare at Jack for two seconds and then he turned sharply in disgust and walked away.

"That was weird." The JOOW was saying as they were dropping their salutes hesitantly. "Did you piss someone officer off, Jack?"

"Not this week." He was saying, but he too was unnerved. A few minutes later the connections in his head plugged in. "Hey Andres, that lieutenant commander that didn't return our salute, was he by any chance a medical officer?"

"Yeah, I think so, I think I saw the medical insignia on his collar."

"Oh, that guys a doctor on base. He set my friends broken arm." The JOOW said.

He got it. A little shock of fear went through him and he turned to Godinez "What's an doctor doing down here on the pier?"

"Who knows, someone's injured, probably."

He looked up and down the pier, though it was far, nothing seemed amiss and suddenly Jack was terribly afraid – he never should have dated an officer! To what extent would things unfold for him now? It was time to call her after watch, again:

"So now you call me!"

"I wanted to see how you're doing." He lied.

"Not good, but what do you care!"

"Amanda, come on…"

"Look, I'm finally seeing someone else and now you come around to torture me!"

That was *Bogus Intell.*

"Did you tell him about us, Amanda?"

"No."

He never played his cards so openly and he kept silent until her voice broke and well, same old story: 'I was

heartbroke – I had to tell someone – I couldn't hold a syringe during an operation and the surgeon…'

"So you told him about me?"

"Well…" and it was the very guy – Lieutenant Commander Markham - who had dated her earlier and she had told him this. Caught in her own trap she said. "I had to tell someone in charge why I couldn't work."

"…"

"I'm sorry Jack."

and etc and she took him back and there he was on the couch again an hour and a half later, with the game on, a brew in one hand and his girl on the other. And along with words: I missed you and love you and why you don't love me and stay with me and so on and on and on.

"This guys a doctor, Amanda."

"But he's not YOU, Jack."

"…"

"I love you Jack."

"…"

"You never tell me that you love me, Jack."

"He was scoping me out, Amanda. Did you sick him on me?"

"No."

"Right!"

"Jack, do you love me?"

"How else is it that he found out about where I go?"

"I don't know."

But he did know now and it almost seemed like a subtle threat she had played on him – and he was now supposed to love her??

"Now that's out right freaky." Godinez was saying that he saw that Markham again looking for Jack again on the pier.

And in his bar, Jack looked over and saw him too. Though was in civilian clothes, He still was very obvious out of place in that bar.

"Damn! This is my bar!"

"Go easy on him Jack," Godinez said. "They officer types get kind of used to getting their way."

"I'm going to have to change bars now!"

"Yeah, it might be a good idea to lay low for a while until you PCS."

"Damn!" he hated changing bars, it was a lot of personal connections would have to be set up again: his favorite barmaid, the bartender, the San Miguels on ice… important stuff.

He looked kind of stingy and then he was talking to a filipina and Jack was watching all this long distance.

“Look, let it drift on by - It’s probably not too often a commander looses his girl to a second class.”

“They can BOTH have each other!” he said in complete frustration punching his own left hand.

“Why didn’t you let her go, Jack?”

“I don’t know!!”

About this same time Jack’s medical records went missing and he really felt claubered! Unknowingly loosing his medical records actually helped him – there were some incidents involving alcohol counseling and some documention of fights he’d been in and they were now off his records for good. But now the guy had complete medical information on him. What was he going to do with it?

“What do you got on me?”

He heard, when he was in the head of his new club and he turned around to find Markham!

“Sir…” he said dumbfounded at his predicament. He eyed the exit, but the guy moved in front of it. And there was no way on earth to fight an officer to get his way out of this… and so he just stood there dumbfounded and mouth hanging open. Good thing he was sober! For once he was sober as can be when it really really counted!! He backed off like he always did at home.

“Well?” he said and he menaced him. The guys fists were clinching and he saw that and backed off to the back bulkhead of the head.

“I’m not sure, sir.” He said.

“The famous Jack McCracken, aren’t you going to fight your way out of here!” he taunted.

“Absolutely not, sir.”

“What afraid of hitting a senior officer, Jack.”

“Well, yessir, I am.”

The guy hadn’t expected an honest and vulnerable answer out of him – that’s when Jack realized his reputation as a fighter had grown really big, that even this guy had heard about it and was planning on ruining his career this way!!

“What do you got over them?

“…”

“What kind of spell do you cast over them that a good woman leaves a good man for a louse like you.”

He shrugged, bewildered. He didn’t know how to answer this cross examination.

“And you could just give her up like a piece of furniture.”

“Well…”

He just stared at the officer before him.

“She won’t have a thing to do with me because of you.”

"I'm sorry sir."

"And I know very well that you could give a damn about her!"

"…"

"I should have you busted for fraternization!"

"She'd get hurt too, sir." Jack inserted quickly.

"Don't you think I don't know that for a second! And I'm not hurting a good nurse's career just to get a shot at a good for nothing louse like you."

"Yessir."

He mocked him back: "Yessir and no sir, you're all professional *now* aren't you, McCracken!"

"Yessir." He said and "WHOOOOOOOOOOOOSH" he smartly ducked a left hook but seeing the guy flush purple with rage at missing him, he let the guy hit him once and he flew backwards against the bulkhead, holding his left eye, he slid on down to the deck, from that position, while holding his eye, he looked up to see if the commander would kick him from there as well.

"Get up Jack and hit me!" he cried. "I order you to!!"

"No sir!!" for a second he was seeing stars and then his father standing over him in the cobblestones on Rickmers Strasse in Germany.

And he kicked him savagely in the thigh "OWh!"

"There, now go report me to the Master at Arms, then McCracken, you pussy!" and he kicked him again.

Jack shook his head 'No' and kept sitting there on the deck getting savagely kicked until the guy felt avenged.

"So, you're not going to fight me!!!? He screamed

And Jack shooke his head.

"Then you're a real son of a bitch!!!!"

And cussing him Markham left him sitting there on the deck in the head.

"What the f…!" Godinez screamed, jumping up seeing him come out of the head wounded. "I'm gonna call the freaking Shore Patrol Right Now!"

"No!" Jack yelled lounging after him holding him back with his uninjured hand."I've had enough trouble with them!"

"But, shit, Jack, an officer shouldn't be able to just wail on anybody he wants!"

"Yeah, but it has ended my troubles, don'tcha see!"

"Woe!"

"Shit, just buy me a beer, will ya, Andres!"

"Dang!!"

And he put the cold brew to his eye, looking at Godinez and rolling his other good eye. "Get me another one – for my mouth!"

And then Jack went straight back to her house and wordlessly began packing all his things into his seabag, while holding a wet towel to his blackeye.

"What Jack!! What's happened?" she cried over and over, following him around the house, pathetically like a wounded dog, grabbing his arm, but he shook her off, wordlessly. "Tell me just one word! Talk to me Jack!" she wept and he said nothing. "Let me look at your eye!"

But then he was going out the door without a word, leaving her house for the last time. She fell to the floor,weeping. He paused for her pitiful state reminded him of Tommy - he *must* be kinder. He lifted her up off her feet, gave her a quick kiss on the cheek.

"You're a serial lover, Jack! But you're really a serial killer cause you take many girls' heart and crush them."

It was too true, but he swore to himself he was never going to get snagged like this again! "Amanda, it's only the sea for me!!" And he left her standing there.

The Feast

And now it was finally time to PCS and head back out to sea.

In the last month he had to set up the orphanage to run from far away, for he had become the manager of it over the years when Chap had been transferred to 'Great Mistakes' Training Command north of Chicago a year back and he had become Chaps right hand man in the South Pacific.

The sisters had asked him to stop by and say goodbye to all the kids and he took a taxi out to see them.

"Seems there's some kind of fest going on…" he told the cabby in Tagalog. They were roasting a water buffalo out in the small square and there were about two hundred people all around and music.

"What holiday is it?"

Santa such and such…

"Neat, well, I'll go there afterwards." He told himself and payed the faire and walked up to the house.

He stood before it desolate - it was was dark and quiet for once. It mimicked the feelings in his heart. He was really sad. He really shouldn't have tossed his girl out like that…

"Jack!" Sister Maria said coming up to greet him. "We go to the square now Jack, go to fest."

"Kids are there?"

“Yes, they all there.” He looked around the house was really quiet for once. His throat was tight and Sister smiled warmly at him.

“I wondered where they were.” he was throat was tight and life was bitter and sad. By now it was too late to get her back. It would be too wrong to wrench her heart about like that when he knew all he wanted to do was be free. He looked at the grass where the thick moss grew into the cement and his heart was sorrowful and the winds sieved their ways through the palm fronds high above. The kids not being here to lighten him wrenched at him sharply, he missed the joyful sounds of their play - play that he himself had given them. “I think I’m never gonna be without them.” He thought to himself, swallowing, although he didn’t ever seem to wonder about going without a girl.

“What wrong, Jack?”

He pointed to the empty playground.

“Yes, you miss them.”

And, nodding humbly, he admitted that he did – he would miss them. It was silly, but most had grown up around him now and they had become like a tight little family to him - when his real family in the States had nothing to do with him! He swallowed in a sudden fit of sadness. Yes, he would miss them something terrible. He was used to hearing the sound of their joyful play on the playground for blocks when he’d walk out there and today it was silent, too silent for him! He was a bad guy like Markham said, and he didn’t deserve the love of anyone, not even them, his angels.

It was that playground sound of joyful children playing – and playing because they wouldn’t have to be ragpicking or whoring – because of Chap, the Sisters, the ship and because of them all! It was a sound, so wonderful, so angelic and pure in its redemption to him, a wise-ass, hard drinking, street-fighting squid, that he was as well… Yep, silly as it was, he’d really miss them something fierce! After Amanda he had become to himself a good-for-nothing louse, a player, a scum-bucket, but the Orphans were his redemption. They made him feel good, when many had said he wasn’t!

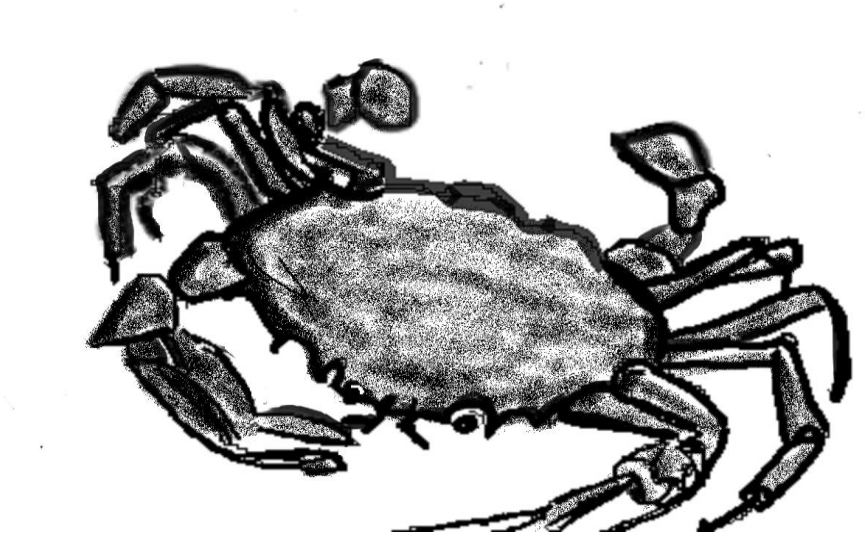
The Sister as she bustled around the corner, hearing the music of the festival down the alley and they came upon the crowd.

And then he saw a big sign: “BYE BYE Jack!” and the crowd broke out in a loud cheer seeing him standing there gapping, the entire neighborhood was a party for his going away!

And the kids - his kids - all came rushing at him, squeezing him tight “Oh wow.” He said in amazement as they

surrounded him in a crowd squeeling joy. He was now in a blurr of water, deeply touched and amazed and the one day he was treated like a prince - that he was.

Part II Interlude, Back to San D.



Honolulu Honeymoon

Now, afew years a year after Molly's father had died Jack had called Flo one day all the way from the PI and told her on the scratchy Autovon line that his cousin's sub was coming back to Ballast Point Subbase on Point Loma for some extensive repairs and could she help him get settled in a little bit?

"Is this a set up – or what!" said Flo bluntly, never missing anything.

"Well, yes, Flo."

"Well, couldn't ya at least tell me that! I don't like surprises Jack!" she snapped. "Be direct with me!"

"Okay, sorry, Flo." He said hushed up now for he always respected her so.

"Well, are you gonna tell me a little about him or not?"

"Huh? Oh, you do wanna meet him?"

"Duh!"

"Oh?! Okay, well, um, his name is Tim. He's 37, divorced, he's a first class petty officer, he's got three sons in Norfolk by her and to be honest he's a bit on the bitter side; his ex really reamed him good on the split, but once you get past that, well, he's a super guy. He's my cousin but he's really been one of my best friends."

So Flo went down to pt Loma Ballast Point Sub base to meet Tim one evening and to the surprise of all, they hit it off immediately!

Tim had said he'd known Flo was the one for him, as she walked down pier three that very first day to meet him in her high heals and Tahitian print dress. He even told the Petty Officer of the Watch "Oh, wow! Get a load of my blind date tonight!"

"Wow!"

And Flo had admired him from the second she saw his eager smile he wore in crackerjack uniform and read his nametag."Petty Officer McCracken?" "He was so smart in that uniform!" she had recounted to Bonnie years later gushing little a little schoolgirl. Afterwards, he'd given her a tour of his sub and she had just loved it. She was the one for him and he snatched her up right away.

After their "Honolulu Honeymoon" at Pearl they moved into quarters at NTC "Liberty Station"[research] including Tim's two older boys, Derrick and Dale. NTC's buildings were made up of an adobe looking orangey-beige plaster, which gave the place a pleasant glow that you get when the sun is just going down through the haze every evening. Launching directly overhead Molly often watched jets because NTC was at the very end of one of the shortest international runways in the world. Only specially trained pilots could fly in or out of there- almost rooftop touching on the high hills other end of the handcupped bay and barely over Point Loma on the other end.

Now Tim was no Jack, nor Tommy Malloy, hailing from the "Old Navy" he seemed strict and serious around her, but then at rare times, he would open up - especially when talking about his work; he took Mama and her down to the waterline, at Ballast Point, where he'd show us the USS _____ an attack sub, _____class.[detailing!] holding her up to look out the periscope to peep all around the coves across to the North Island Air Station. How grand that was! All the gear on the boat stashed the complex pipes and machinery, the confined spaces, the ultra clean smell of - it must have been a Navy issued cleaner for all boats had that same smell - and one whiff even after decades and

she was straight back there in her early childhood visit on that boat. In all this it didn't occurred to her for years that everyone's Dad didn't have such interesting jobs as her stepfather's and Jack's.

Molly watched her mother carefully, somehow she'd loved this new man, who was serious and quiet and hardly ever spoke to her unless she was doing something 'unsat.' But Mama had coo-ed like a dove and grabbing him from behind "I'll always be grateful to Jack for telling me about you, Tim."

"Yes, pet, and Jack will always be welcome in our house."

And they descended into long time togetherness a serious case of chronic happiness and it gave Jack lots of pleasure to see them so happy at his hands.

"You just don't know what a good woman is." Tim told his cousin one day when he was back in town on a visit. "She's always thinking of me, fussing over me, cooking for me… you should enjoy this kind of happiness."

"I'm afraid I'd get one like your ex."

"Well, you gotta look at them from the inside too and Flo is like a princess on the inside as well – altogether different form the last one."

"Here's to Flo!" they toasted.

"The best darn woman on the planet!" Molly blushed when she heard this.

Base housing had a nice garage which Tim made into a den, with a nice pool table and smoky couches "The Foc'sle" where Tim's friends shot endless rounds of pool, drank cases of beer and smoked cigars, opening the garage door every evening to a welcome San Diegan seabreaze, palm tree rustles, gull squawks and jets swash.

Underneath, the Den, they talked story of their pursuits in the deep - what they could talk about, that is, and that's how she knew so much ASW stuff – she'd grown up with it all her little life.

The Six Hundred Ship Navy

San Diego, CA

The autumn winds, the "Santanas" blew from the high desert plateau beyond the coastal Sierras Nevadas, scorching the scrubby mountain passes; always bringing ashy winds, unrelenting fires, parched skin, and aching lips. When the countryside was not on fire they brought and brilliant blue desert skies. Also they blew the ever-present fog away with the Seventh fleet, which departed en masse to our EastPac – off the Californian Coast for drills on station, for, that was the worst 'Red Breakout' of the sub Cold War - Soviet Subs just offshore up and down our entire western coast ; (She found out years later).

It was a 600 ship Navy now, under President Reagan and his flamboyant SecNav Lehman, for the subchase had gotten hotter and hotter, and the missiles nested within the subs created a grander and global chase. She'd been a two thousand ship Navy in the Great War, but with all the electronic wizardy of technology at hand, and F-18s that could fly at Mach 2, while shooting a Tomahawk missile, six hundred was a mighty number, indeed, to put upon the seas!

And Jack was to sea for months, like they were holding down the home fort in a siege of war, which is what it actually was back then, though few people knew just how extensive. There were so many of subs the *Enterprise* [research] actually had a collision with a Russian sub out in our own Baja waters, our EastPac. Fie! For Shame! They'd say. My! But how close the enemy was back then! They could tell you some things…things that are still hidden under the cloak of the cold war, at hand.

Tim had a long tour away from them - back under the deep waters of the Pacific he disappeared into for years. Flo and Molly were alone again... expectant.. waiting.. wondering... worried... as Navy wives and dependents would, standing solemn sole watch over household.. He'd surface on the other side of the sea .. one day off Japan, another off Kamchatchka, Vladivostok, another in the Yellow Sea.. Hong Kong, or later in Korea or Adak, or Pearl...

For when the windvane turned its rooster's beak westward the Santanas seem to blow the fleet so far west they came to the east, the ancient east where the fleet did battle, in the trenches of the deep sea, 'gainst our great 'Eastern' foe the Reds. And the warwidowed town 'San D', she was leaderless and featureless all found themselves busied with chores left undone by with the reign of the Favorite Sons; all the jaunty, charming crackerjacks gone, the town forlorn, the youth, the zest robbed to the WestPac World and the city spinsterly dull.

Their men, their passion on the far side of the world had vanished, gone into the arms of the East!

Cast adrift flockless Molly fellback into her woeful ways - a hermitage in the library from the cruelest of clutches of clicks unkind, who were ruled by the likes of the cheerleading/football playing sort, that reigned by exclusion - the 'We' crowd against us solitary 'thems'- they, the library hounds, the geeks, the bookish ones, and the Navy, Marine, and Coasty brats. Molly could see right through Penny and Lola's sort - how only the long gossamer threads of gossip held them all together!! They had no heart as produced by tragedy, for so rich were they, and thus immune to the scourges of life which are the upbuilding of sorrows. And Mo was rich in these treasures, for on the Jackwatch for years she had been.

Propicious, and uncanny was the tossling breaze messing up locks, that likewise cleared out the caverns of the skull. Molly had never been a prettygirl nor a popular one..rather she had sat on the fringes of high school society, watching her co-eds date and prom and party. Two years in a row, Penny had won the Prom Queen and she'd seen her moving her gloved hand in a cupping motion as the court made its way through the school parades. One weekend when her parents had gone to Baja Penny and her older sister, Cynthia, who was also a cheerleader, threw a party and about a thousand of kids from high school showed up, clogging their street, even smoking pot in the alleys and wild carrying on, so much that the cops came and rousted them and remembering this feat of popularity.

But Molly thought that Jack had actually earned his status through the piling seas, the brutal seas, for once, he'd taught her words like this: "Molly once you've been through a WestPac Typhoon Season, the worst storms the sea can throw at you are nothing!"

Shipboard again

Jack went with them on liberty to the bars of Sydney and Bangkok, and Yokusuka, where there were lots of girls and less restrictions and it was great to be so free! He missed Amanda rather acutely, but the exhileration of freedom began to blot her out and he was now completely free. He was wayward again while in port... but sober at sea... a haunting duet for the drunken dance.

It makes good copy his cruises, for many a postcard from the Far East, delivered to his family in San Diego, they

could see him now, piping tall, grog-like charm, yet ere a smile for the little fatherless Molly's and Jezzys all over the port worlds, who he could deliver good cheer with a jaunty jack sailor walk n'talk sway! How he managed to rum-like smile... intoxicating the towns... yet he could never stay long, for one of his mistresses, like the *Kitty* or the *Connie* would swept him away, when she'd hoist anchor, yank up her skirts and pull the heck outta port; and so drink and deliverance were plotted on his course.

There was nothing as far reaches as the WestPac and the dangerous straights that led to the IO - the Indian Ocean, to the Persian Gulf, of dangerous shark infested waters, that as a Far East as we all know, then its back door to Europe through the Suez canal and the 'civilized' west, but the lure of the IO and the dense green Jurassic jungles of Indonesia, the incense of Bombay, the saris, the Punjabi, the Persian's abah. Why! It was all so faraway, like the Seychelles, Ceylon, Mascarene, Muscat, Bandar Abass.. where Sinbad put to sea in many a tall tale.. and the tales were lusty and spicy with the dark pulsing musk of the jungles of the Eastern Gate.

Some of his shipmates hated Jack for he was too much - no one could quite blame them, and up the rates he climbed as the years at sea and overseas assignments and recruiting duty passed finally up to first class. He joked "Looks like I'm never gonna make Chief." There he stayed back to his high water mark rate, this time with the true north affection of whatever boat he was stationed on – he became lost at Sea, except for his little family back on the beach in San D and the orphanage, and in his lost paths he was beloved... at was life at sea with six thousand souls on one boat, *like dear Connie.*

And that man that could walk and talk with a ton of grief on his shoulders, into a compartment of gossiping – 'scuttle butting' - about him, he could walk in there, knowing full well what they said, and the dark ballast in him withstood that tossing about their little petty wickedness about the card tables, and sooner, not later, he too had their favor too like a great glass of rum to gulp down… from port to port, from drink to drink... a tiger again, a hard fisted card player; a burnished tan, hard drinkin', hard fightin' sailor man.

From drinks, to cards, to girls, to games, it was all a course to stay the ways of his life, from endless watches round the clock, sleep deprived, always standing in line: for grub, for showers, for mail call, for everything! Sleep on nights of flights ops just one deck above their racks, sleep over the landings of F-14s right above, sleep over the defeaning whoosh of the catapult, yet stay awake four hours upon a silent darkened bridge or bow watch…

Or, too much with the boys he was, never a space where one could look with one's own eyes and see grief's final etch upon his soul, to bear it all - and so back to the drink he went. That which had butchered him, had fortified him and there was no real peace, except far out on the wide Western Pacific. And his own words from his own mouth with those harrowing seas they so regularly tread: “I’m just a gutterdrunk unless I’m far out to sea.”

The Veering Winds

'Tween Times, the slack years, an interlude

Molly knew the rest of Jack's story, for she had grown up with it: how the ship kept him sober and focused on mission, on watch, on station... and how Liberty was a time of joining with the boys and descent. He was enchained, but did he know it?? He'd left the rat guards off his lines, for, once in a season, he would not refuse drink's demands. Sober he was for weeks, spanning into months even, and then once in a spell he was lost as lost can be. Or, on a portcall with the boys, the pressure mounted and kept him gulping down the boose with his shipmates.

Only the sea could unshackle him, where no storm could turn him to rum, nor privy the lost corners of his mind. Only the sea was his truce, his solace from agony of troubles' keep. Unreasonably Molly would blame the Navy which kept him FROM trouble and IN trouble, for what was life out to sea but full of troubles and how did a sailor traditionally solve them - but with grog? All he knew was the grog - the power of serving others worked its miraculous force – but Jack forgot to moorfast in his own forgiveness, and sobriety, of course.

But he still just wanted to slink back into being an anonymous sailor, perhaps have a few drinks somewhere when back in port, but it was too late for that, for Jack's struggle with drink had captured the very heart of the ship and the Seventh fleet and in that he would be not soon forgotten…

During that interlude, he'd kept the promise to the Chaplain about the orphange and it had prospered, even as he had not. He'd gotten publicity from the *Navy Times* to help sustain it over the many years, and with that he became rather well-known throughout the Pacific Fleet. He'd told Tim once, while fishing, how embarassed it'd made him, for he'd modestly told the *Times* writer that interviewed him that all this effort was really just for AA service, but the sisters of the orphange had told the *Times* that Jack had outdone himself, and of course, the story writer had used that hook in the article and praising his efforts reading: "out of heartbreak and tragedy a fleet sailor helps orphans while combating alcoholism." "And now," he'd said "The whole friggin' Navy knows about me!" Indeed, everywhere he went he was known for his orphanage and for his struggles with alcoholism--which he sometimes didn't seem to be

winning. “I feel uncomfortable, with all the attention.…” he’d told Tim, who’d tease him about everyone knowing him “…because I can’t have a beer on base without somebody bringing that up!”

Recruiting Duty

After Jack’s enormous success raising funds many people – including his own sarcastic chiefs would tell him that he had a gift leading people and he decided to try recruiting duty – it was a great career move anyway to get a recruiter’s badge, so he put his chit for it for the one place that held any kind of permanence for him – West Virginia; for he was a Navy Brat his family had had so many homes in many different places and countries – from Keflavik, Iceland to Rosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, to Norfolk, Virginia, to Rota, Spain and finally Mayport, Florida. Then his father had made mate in the merchant marines where they made Bremerhaven, Germany their home for four years. Only his mother’s West Virginia held any kind of permanence for him, for he and his mother and older brother Eric had visited there once a year most every late summer since he could remember, after he stayed a month long on his father’s ship under ‘the old man’.

After recruiting school and after another stop in San Diego to visit Tim, Flo and Molly and later Rosy McCoo who was now a chief and stationed in Norfolk he made his way to the back hollars of Charleston, West Virginia, He found his lost family – his mother’s many brothers and sisters, even his grandmother there in the back hollars – where the sun doesn’t reach the floor of the valleys in winter, where the slopes of the mountains were steep and forbidding to outsiders, fortresslike where in them he had found his kin the wild McClannahan tribe of his mothers, who welcomed him warmly to their homes and taverns and towns where he, of course set new records in recruiting, pool playing, drinking and trouble – he seldom did anything on a small scale.

But, he ‘managed’ his trouble now; he’d beat it: he never let himself drink during the week, working his tail off all week and ignored his family, going high schools, to colleges, to the malls, etc. He had a wall of pictures he’d taken on his liberties and as a teenager of twenty-three different countries he’d seen in the Navy. He could slam a kid into Boot Camp before he knew what happened. Needless to say he was able to get a lot of girls to join. But a lot of boys too – they wanted a part of him and what he had had – the multiple countries and adventures he’d had and the recruiting command had given him two letters of commendation for recruiting minorities and women.

But when the weekend was over he'd come back to the office ragged and hungover and the other two recruiters had noticed – but even drunk he'd managed to bring in kids he'd met through his uncles and extended family and friends in their local taverns – sort of his new recruiting station. And few could complain, for he did his job so well, as he always did. It was the free times that took our Jack and deluged his immortal soul.

And then after his tour was up he found himself in Yokusuka on a shore assignment, his rotation due him. And it was another human relations – they'd given him career counselor duties again. He found himself in favor with the brass again hew was so thankful! Superb evals again and a sharp uniform helped.

And he used it well to help his orphanage. And there was again the lovely longhaired Michiko at his side. But by then though he didn't wouldn't let himself see it, the heavy weekend drinking was dragging him out and he longed for the open sea and a WestPac cruise as all those on the ached for the endless vistas and for the focused sobriety afforded to those on the very long haul. And so back on a ship headed back to San Diego, finally after years and years aboard, he was to be homeported in home. the USS Peleliu – a 'gator' known as an LPH, found him a first class petty officer, now multiple ribbons on his chest, he stood on the bridge with the captain and the OOD and the open sea was his bride once again.

The Foc’sle

Later on Mama didn't like Molly "goin' down thar" she said sarcastically mocking her library books on the sea, saying it was "Mans World" as she soon started her big quest to proselytize Molly into the ways of womenfolk. Molly laughed to herself at this, for on base they were surrounded by thousands of sailors and recruits everywhere and dressed as a boy she was left completely alone! It allowed for immense freedom, to roam port at will.

Her much older stepbrothers stayed with them at times being the closest thing she had to brothers. Too much to include in this log about our Jack, they were in sometimes at home, but they disappeared into adultland before she knew it. She felt actually had some in common with Denny Faegan, who’d come to the den with Jack from time to time.

And so along with a various cast of strange friends: portlepers, the ‘rats, and all sorts of tramps and bums, Molly made a collection of port friends – like Jack would.

The more Mama pressured her the more she ran down into their den, in Padres ball cap and shirt, disappearing from girlhood into into a even younger looking boy and was always welcome with her Jack when he was home. They roved the port and the town at will and he told her endless sea stories – always with some kind of point to them – about the Sea, about Life, and even some about Love.

When he was gone her world was empty and bereft and she often wandered round the Spanish stuccoed base flanked by numerous towering palm trees and into the port, where she could watch the ships coming and going past the yacht harbors throughout the straits of North Island, or taking the bright red trolley she went down to 32nd street base where amongst the numerous gray hulls she wandered bored, waiting for her Jack to reappear.

Jack had had some courses at NTC during the intervening years before he was homeported later in the 80s'. Rick never came over without Jack - being a third class he was not as uncomfortable with hanging out with a first class. Really, though, Tim regarded Rick as irresponsible. He too had gathered a DUI, and he had a reputation as 'always skatin' - both of which Tim despised as intolerably lazy and in low standing in jargon like ‘dirtbag’ or ‘douchebags’ words for sailors they thought of as seabums. But Molly saw that Rick could surprise you when he came up with the neatest of sayings at every stressful corner, like "Sometimes you gotta let’ em go." or "Never let ‘em see you sweat." or her favorite: "Save it for a rainy day." But the three altogether, and sometimes with Denny,

they were fabulous somehow, in balance around Jack, hauling their shipmates down to the den, where it was always a bit merry more than most garages.

Jack and Tim were opposites, yet equals, despite their growing difference in ranks and accomplishments. Tim got award after award, top evals and top assignments; while Jack got tickets, trouble and endless girlfriends. Where Jack was dynamic, Tim was steady and reliable. Jack could sway a ship, in a tournament, but Tim's tough authority you smartly obeyed. Yet somehow, they were equal together, perfect compliments, even getting motorcycles about the same time.

"Aren't you jealous that he spends all that time on the bike, with Jack?." A salon mate asked Mama, after a particularly long bike trip the two took on the Pacific Coast Highway up the incredibly mountainous Californian coast line to Big Sur.

"No ma'am," Mama'd said. "I'm glad they both have each other." She used to tell her daughter how rare it was for men to have such good friends "..and besides it gets them outa your hair some.." she laughed, scratching her buffont do.

Of course Flo and Jack had a longtime bond, that went back years before this. When Jack's ship was in port, or when he was going to some school at NTC, he rarely came by without sitting a while on her kitchen stool and smoking a cig or drinking a mug of veteran black coffee, over intriguing gossip with Flo. Molly had many memories of doing homework on the table as they chatted along. Mama was always nagging Jack to eat better and lay off the cigs. He'd just laugh at her semi-mothering and then re-shuffle his deck of cards, with a "rastlely-whoosh-thunk". But Flo never brought up Tommy, nor the P.I. nor 'a longago'. It never occurred to Molly that they'd ever be Jackless, for though the times would sweep them out to sea, for before long he'd always be back, mug in hand, sitting on that barstool while Mama diced and slivered out dinner. And then it would never seem like he'd been gone for very long.

Then the postcards would herald his homecoming from afar from vast distances like Singapore to Hong Kong to Pearl Harbor and soon he'd be there again, back on the barstool dealing the deck quietly.

Molly had one special trick: she usually knew wherever Jack would be when he was in town…on board ship, or on base at NTC, RTC, or, in the taverns or in the grills, or in the girls' arms like Lola… She was his special buddy afterall and he usually found time for her at some point in every week. And he could do no wrong in the book of Moll. The best place ever to find him was very early morning fishing he did on the

_____pier, for he was always so calm and perspective and had ready ears to listen to the silly little problems of the port tomboy. And following him, fishing became Molly's great escape as well.

She often griped about Tim to Jack, and though he was his cousin, he seemed to know how to make her feel better around him. "Just remember he spends fifty hours a week yelling at recruits or dogging out company commanders." He laughed. "I need to take my own advice about chiefs - they're a tough lot, y'know. I'm going to be one, one day."

He often taught her of many things, sitting there fishing, she thought he had some desire to be a father, he was so instructive and concerned about her little world. But what she mostly taught her was straight out of his life, from these little parables out to sea: how to fit in, how to be strong and independent, how to take no poop, how to take a crass boss in tow, how to help others, how to not be bullied, how to stop an attack before it even started… He quizzed her later on in the week to make sure she was heading his words and paying attention and she never failed to amuse him at how well she soaked it all in. He noted how similar she was to Jezzy in this smart, uncanny ways and it touched his heart as always. If he wasn't a good person he was at least trying to be one…and who was it that said tend to the orphans and the widows?

"Molly's gonna do well in life." He told Flo one day when she was supposed to be downstairs. "Everything I tell her she listens to."

"Well, then tell her to start wearing clothes like a girl!" Her mother had snapped back, hands on hips.

"Oh! Just you let mother nature take care of that course, Flo."

"When's that gonna be Jack!" she said impatiently wiping her hands on her apron she was so aggravated "She's seventeen!"

"It'll come in time, Flo…"

"I'm raising a SON!"

"…when she discovers boys."

There by the dock Jack was all hers. Though he was so handsome and so very popular, he always made time for her somehow. He oftentimes said little but listened carefully. Somehow though brutally handsome, life had broken him for her and so they were good friends then, though she never had understood why – or what had really happened 'out there'. He belonged to her she sensed, more than Bon, more than Lola, he belonged to Molly as if no one else except Jezzy nd there was never a time in her where it all meant more to her, than those

times by the bay that he spent with her. She was a part of his world and he had became a part of hers.

The days went by so pleasantly with him back now. Her parents entertained more and it was a festive house now Jack was back.

And they fished and walked to Balboa Park and weeks flew by like this in pleasantness. It was all this time he spent with her that finally drew her attention, as she struggled to talk him to something that had been missing from her life all along -- no one she knew ever spoke very much of her real father.

And then Jack would go back out to sea giving poor Moll years to ponder all this.

Beginnings of the Great RIFting of the Fleet

Reductions In Forces

"There were two thousand American Naval Fighting Ships on 'VJ Day' – the day when the Japanese Emperor on the Battleship Missouri signed Unconditional Surrender."

Dictionary ofAmerican Naval Fighting Ships

As an anchor was to a ship: so the Navy was to his family and his home. Everyone he knew and cared for was anchored to her in some way or another. But She was also his bread, his career, his future, his retirement – she was his very life. Well, times would be changing when later the Soviet threat would diminish from Perestroika, Glasnost and Gorbachev, as came a warming off the Siberian shelf, hastening the eventual mothballing of their great sub fleet in Polyarny. Later it seemed people forgot somehow that their subs had intercontinental ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads enough to wipe out the planet as we knew it. We'd just forget that and heroes like Jack who'd helm ships all around the sea chasing them with task forces and P3 Orions. Our greatest foe would later yield, but would be soon leaving our professional heroes like the high tide, beached. Would the Navy need such fleet sailors with such fleeting pasts?

For answers Molly looked to his green seabag, standing by his couch - in him as his whole life was in it, and of the sea in every aspect. Standing silent watch over him, at parade-rest, its head hung over in a prayer bow, it spilled Jack's secrets all over the deck, when she had found him drunken again. The seabag made her so sad, it being so full of would be hope, and full of the little treasures collected from a life at sea and by the world's shores. Dark times like this she could understand the need for a drink and he had drowned himself in it. Gosh days would pass before he would be well again, as he lay mute and undone. Meanwhile only then the seabag would speak for him - and his picture album spilling of *tales of the drunken and unsobered kind*.

Now in the scope of her life, she'd seen him at his highest and lowest - the shining, swaying sailor to rum laden, and bum bound drunk. Folded like a poker hand, cashed in his chips, laid low, low.. derelict ship...

Waiting for Jack

Backbiting and bittermean her peers were and as much as she hated high school petty wickedness – her Mama loved it - and of course, catapulted Molly into it.

So, with Jack gone t'sea, back to the books she went, kicked off shoes 'tween lazy library stacks, sittin Injun style with Stevenson - Treasure Island and Pieces of Eight, Spanish Doubloons. Back to 'pyrate's lair, Blackbeard, Bellamy, Corsairs, Brigantines and Cutty Sark Tall Ships races hailing from Jack's Bremerhavener Town. Back into daydream world, this fledgling ship's-tomboy-debutante- want-to-be sailor, daughter dreamer went. Back to fishin' and endless seasitting by the pier she had left. Maybe she'd join the Nav, she thought of the poster - *Gee! I wish I were a man! I'd join the Navy!*

For, Collegeworld loomed in distance - more of this high school malarkey - sorority and fraternity hazing and popularity contests based on how skinny, how tanned - and how catty one could be. 'Bulima Babies' Denny had once joked with Molly when she had cried once after a particularily mean bout with a girl named so tritely: Penny, that sometime Jack used to see a while back

"Moll, 'er parents didn't spare a dime in naming her, did they?"

"No." she boo-hooed. "It's short for Penelope."

"Next time you see her call her 'Nickel', accidently."

One time while Jack was in the EastPac Flo and Molly heard of a SAR mission in the Eastern Pacific - the helos scrambled from North Island Air Station – an ET3 had fallen overboard in a storm and was lost at sea. For some reason this magnified her suffering for Jack, as they walked often along the cliffs of Point Loma- For once she understood the suffering of the sailor's lot: to battle storms when all the rest of our forces were at relative peace. For it was the sea that was the fleet's true arch enemy not the Cold War! She actively pursued ships at every point with capriciousness of a wizards: storms fetching gigantic waves, or collisions at sea, tsunamis, volcanoes, undersea landslides, man overboard, line snaps, mooring in strong currents, heavy winds, icebergs, faulty navigation into shoaly waters, strong currents, shark seething waters, pirates ...

But, the most ultimate weapon she waged - Fire! Fire to sea... that had blazed on the brand new *USS Forrestal's* maidenfight off Yankee station of Vietnam, causing her bombs to explode, and hundreds to die. Fire! to sink a ship in calm waters or port or even Drydock -- oh, Fire, worse than war, -- a rather constant comrade of carriers t'sea!

In contrast to her vigilance and bravery at sea, the Navy was rewarded with almost constant scandal in the years to come, sometimes deservedly, but many times the scale was not counter-weighted with the accomplishments, which being far out to sea, or being far beneath the surface, or even being very strategic in nature, were really undervalued as they were unknown. The great scandals rocked her wake like the *USS Forrestal's Fire*, the Tail Hook scandal, The Walker Spy Ring, The *USS Stark*, *USS Iowa, USS Vincennes mishaps...* caused endless press exploits... was it because she was such a big target, with her big visible coastline bases, her huge assets and big high tech ships silhouetted on the horizon for all the press to see.

But in later years, as Molly grew older and wiser, she thought it was none other than the course of the curse of the WestPac fever shivering down the Navy's spine. For in those Eastern ports her sailors had done some wrong and done much right, under the towering seas, and with boys struggling to be men under the swaying of a mast and a mariner's traditional and sometimes seedy way of life.

And yet there was honor and bravery in her Naval blood, in her history, in her sacrifices. No slogan could capture it, "Not just an adventure" - for the hills on Point Loma - they are covered by massive unknown cemeteries - a forest of white headstones were planted, lying to in the hills which handcup this Navy Bay, lined in ships. Blood bought honor - their blood blessing lay to upon the coast they had died for, an honor to the town as only blood spilt honor can, covered 'round the bay, protective-like to guard the fleet below, who's ships *hold thousands of precious ones, our fleet-sailing fighting, seaworthy sons!*

And, to be lost - never found again - Why was Molly's sorrow so inexpressible and so inexplicable?

Mama, Bonnie and Molly had taken to walking every evening at sundown on Point Loma, past these cemeteries ever overviewing the town below.

"I miss Jack, Mama." she thought of the words "Lost at Sea" trembled and stumbled and upon the very words, unknowingly treading upon the curse that followed Jack everywhere, undertow. The rustles of palm fronds in the seabreazes all around – a song it was chorused in her head "*quieted their spirits in a song of silence, and of solace and longing verse of seawidows, we.*"

"I know honey." She said eyes spanning the wide Pacific before them, as if she could broadcast to the antennas and periscope of the USS _____ surfacing just to catch her thoughts she sent over the wide waters - like beacons...a summons, a convocation to the deep ones… was it for Tim she longed..or the lost unbegotten Tommy buried over yonder?

"When's Jack coming back?" Molly said for the umpteenth time.

"Oh, he'll probably be here for the Fourth of July or Fleet Week in October."

"That's too long.

"I know, Molly." They could then see a fast frigate steaming out to sea right between the channel below us, to their back was the Pacific. How fast the frigate came through it - she must have been a nuke – she wondered which one she was, straining to see the number beads on her bow..Perhaps she knew guys aboard her that she'd met with Jack and Tim.. What station she headed she to? Did she battle those wide Pacific worlds all alone, or in convoy? She steamed smartly out her sailors working her seaward, edging her past the swift cold California current, plying her out to the EastPac off Baja and to the mighty fathomless Pacific ocean, onto different Oriental shores and faraway worlds they'd sail to..the worlds that could only hold their Jack... where her Daddy had been...

"Let's go see Daddy's stone. " said Flo, her mother had said.

Suddenly, throat feeling strangled, and spooked for some unknown reason, Molly stopped and froze in her place. She'd not thought of her Daddy in some time, laying in coffin just over there, forever alone… Her throat suddenly tightened… Lost at Sea…

Flo and Bon had walked ahead little lost in the golden sunlight of evening's tint, then they both looked down to seeing Molly stricken and stunned.

"Oh, Molly… " Mama suddenly grabbed her tight and Bonnie too, the three stood in the dusk, amongst thousands of headstones and in their woman prayers. Always they prayed for their men; for their men were a woman's cross, if there ever was one.

But a few days later Flo told Molly that Jack had called afterall. "Well, I didn't tell you something because it was midterms, but Jack did call the other night. He just sent us a box of goodies."

"Oh, great! From where?"

"Hong Kong I think."

"Wow! I'm gonna go there one day."

She looked at her eyes open wide. "How?"

"I might join the Nav."

She frowned. Molly rapidly changed the subject. "What's Jack doing?"

"Same old stuff." she said now irritable and throwing her handsout.

"What do you mean.. he got to go to Hong Kong, didn't he?"

"Yeah."

"What's wrong?"

"Sounded like he was drinking again."

"How can you tell? Was he drunk?"

"No… I can kind of sense it in him, though." Mama could confide at times and then she'd wake up remembering that Molly was her child not her girlfriend, and act as if nothing was wrong in the world! "Oh, silly, don't worry about it. It was nothing."

The three years past of Tim's deployment; they moved into a downtown house; and Tim came back from his sub to be in charge of company commanders at RTC. Mama told me he didn't really like doing that at all as he was a very dry person and not given into extravagance of personality to mould recruits and their company commanders - the CCs. "He's doing it for me." She said hands clasped under her chin, so little girl like that she seldom let Molly see.

Tim's sub had no grand, harborwide homecoming like Jack's - for security reasons, really. But that seemed a bit unfair to Molly - for his job was pervasively hard, absolutely demanding, tight, dangerous inconspicuous, hidden and unknown. Little did he care about his leftout glory, but she did... it was like Tim’s sacrifice - and theirs as well - didn't seem to matter.

Tim let Molly practice touch typing in his new office one evening at NTC, while he moved into his new desk and finished up some paperwork on some recruits with medical discharges. As she pecked sporadically away the phone rang auspiciously, and she just knew it was Jack when Tim answered it dryly and then glanced right at her and said warmly as is possible for Tim "Hey there!"

"Tell him hello for me!" she yelled from the keyboard.

"Molly says hello, Jack… sure" and he held out the phone to her and she scrambled right over to get it - never dreaming he'd wanta talk to just her, long distance, right off.

"Hey! Uncle Jack!"

"Hey, Molly. How you been?" The line echoed like a sound coming from the scratchy needle of an old RC Victorola record player, hailing from another era, another time, another world - which indeed, he was worlds away out in the Far East.

"Where are you?"

"Yokusuka."

"What you been doing?"

"Oh, you know, WestPac cruise. What have you been doing, Moll?"

She told him all about touch typing, and a trip up to the beautiful Laguna Beach Cove, where they did rock diving off the coves up there.

"Oh.. wish I could be there with you guys." he seemed sad.

"When you coming back, Jack?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"How's Rick?"

"He's doing good. He's on the *Oriskany* now."

"Seen him lately?"

"Yeah, we caught up with each other in the PI."

"Neat."

"Yeah…"

Tim held out his hand in demand to get the phone back. "Well, I've got to go now."

"Well, okay, then."

"You take care of You and I love you, Jack." She suddenly added despite Tim being there.

"Well, I love you too, Molly." he said so sweetly, that she had wanted to cry.

From the rest of the 'phonecon' she gathered that there were breakers broiling for Jack. Typically on a ship everyone gets at each other's throats. One time he had called it "Detailism" - about pestering people to death about little details - who didn't clean the coffee mess - though it was heavy seas - who didn't make their rack - who had the fan blowing too hard or not hard enough, who kept taking the black 'US Govt' pens - and that was just compartment mates - not to include the rest of the ship, the chiefs, the brass, etc. He'd told her once, you either got hard and aggressive, brown nosed everyone, or you got yourself a tight bunch of shipmates so nobody would mess with you without messing with them too. He was the leader of that pack mostly, where in the limelight he could safely

outshine the others. She guessed that's where sailors got their enormous reputation as charmers - to keep the rest of folks at bay, for it's a very social job to work any ship through the waters... to "protect and defend the Constitution'... and stuck to sea with each other for months at a time, social skills were a premium -- and Jack reigned in them. Charm could be aggressive too.. But he never was like that with his family in San D. and that's what she had loved about him best of all... His sweet heart shined when he was home in the Den.

But having a tight set of mates - well they paid a big price to pay for that too - on liberty when they drew their pay and out to the clubs together as a block of forced camaraderie, as if the drinking is what kept the ship well lubed. If a sailor liked to visit the new town you must mind the group first, for no sailor wanted to be an outsider from it, which was to be an outcast, and an object of the scuttlebutt. Put a mug of San Miguel to lips and join the revelry -- or else!

Yet even with his skills he chose a dangerous path and the constant round the clock watches and trouble tore anyone apart, but the highest adapters, like Jack. In this, she thought unreasonable things: 'It's the Navy that's doing' it to him."

*Mombasa Liberty Decadence

Chapter -

Mombasa, Kenya Port-o-call, 22 SEP 80

Before the plague of Aids struck Africa, the port of Kenya was a regular stopping port for the ships of the US Navy, and Jack found himself looking over into the African Continent, and then getting liberty. As usual he gathered a gang of squids to go in town with them.

"Check it out." Robbie was telling them

"It's a shrunken head."

"Yeah, right."

"No its for real."

"What?"

"It's a real shrunken human head."

They gathered around looking at it – this had been a human being once dangling on a string." Its was chilling but in a way thrilling – like going into the Amazon into a forbidden backwater world, and falling off the edge of the civilized world.

"Shoot, lets go on a Safari." He was telling them and they were grabbing shots here and there and were literally game for anything.

Later that day, upon the range the driver pulled up to a pride of lions, and they were all real lit up by the drink. And a male lion approached the cage they were being towed in.

"Oh! Shit!"

And the lion jumped ontop of the cage and sat there guarding his captives.

"Man they'll never believe this."

They were taking pictures of his undersides.

"he sure stinks!"

And they were banging on the cage, but the beast would not leave finally the driver began to drive off and he climbed off and they were so drunk when they got back to mumbasa that they could scarcely stand up.

Jack Back

But alas six months in the South China Sea, they went onto Guam, the PI and then back home ending *The Constellaton's* 18th[?] deployment to sea. Another fleet week special it was. The ships steamed proudly back home again, sailors lined the rails in dress white crackerjacks, silhouetted against the cheery bright blue skies. And once passed-in-review through the strait under Point Loma's gaze. How marriage-like of wedding fleet to home port! All around the bay folks held up posters: "I Love Seaman Sean Chadbourne!" "Danny, we miss you!"... thousands of Navy families and San D folks on *the piers on the quay, for a homecoming, sweet homecoming day!*

Jack gave them a tour that day of the fast frigate that was Jack's new homeship. Rick's ship the *Ranger* was a part of the battle group as well and he was in town as well. How fitting that Tim was in port then, too.

"Hey, it's so much smaller than a carrier." Molly said after they ha hit the bottom deck so soon where the boiler room sat. It looked as if rust could never enter even a speck on this compartment, filled with a variety of pipes, boilers, gauges and equipment of all sorts, all newly and thickly painted and kept up extremely well. And that smell again - so clean, she whiffed it up like a man's cologne, saying "It's so clean here.. no rust anywhere."

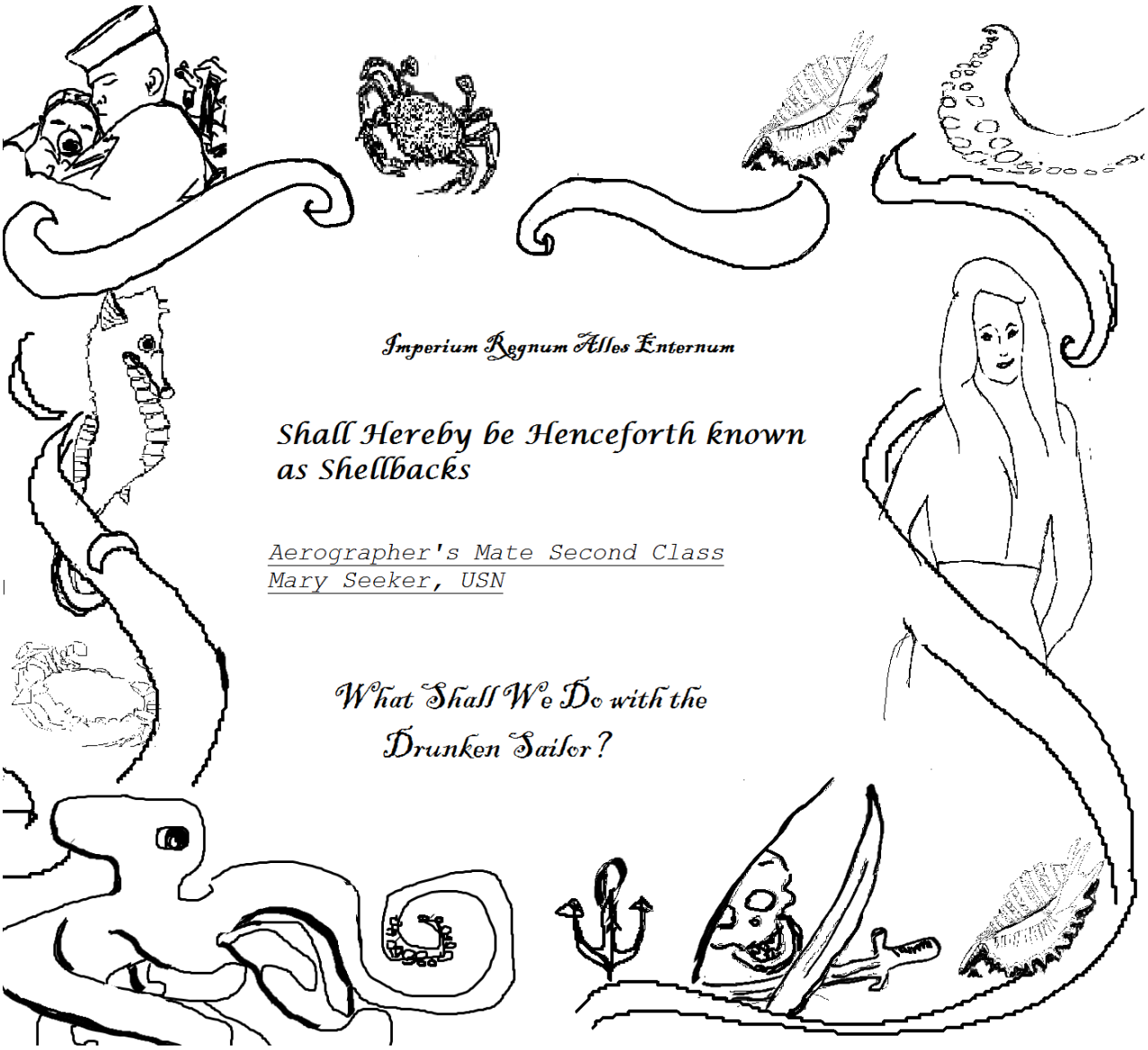
"That's cuz all we sailors do aboardship, is chip and paint, chip and paint." said Jack. "Ain't that right, Rick."

"It's a sailor's life." he answered.

Jack later gave Bonnie, Flo and Molly Tahitian sarongs from Pearl for they were Jack's girls in one way or another and off they went to the house packed with a feast, and the boys to the Den, talking story after story, yarn after yarn, they were happy home together again.

It was during these port visits that she strained herself to prop up enough courage to ask him of her real father, for her mother had given her the same limited abbreviated story year after year, and really she knew very little of him. But, Jack had known him on the last voyage of his, and perhaps could enlighten the mystery of him to her somewhat. Who was he? Sometimes when she was little she used to think Jack was her daddy and not that other guy – she could scarcely remember him at all. But she'd always remembered Jack.

And things were the same as they were as years ago – they were great big buddies, though Mo was way too big to sit on his lap. And it was then she had started wearing that ballcap - that hat that made her an equal and not separated from the neat world of the boys -- and her precious sailor Jack.



Imperium Regnum Alles Enternum

Shall Hereby be Henceforth known as Shellbacks

Aerographer's Mate Second Class
Mary Seeker, USN

What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor?

Part III Molly Malloy



"What shall we do with the drunken sailor?
What shall we do with the drunken sailor?
What shall we do with the drunken sailor?
Ear-lye in the morn-ning!"

Libertytown, San Diego, California: 1986

….And she had found him sometimes sitting, or one time laying, on the railway tracks in the nooks and crooks of the alleys and railbeds, where weeds grew 'tween spars, and rusted cars mouldered on the rails. A Han Jinnh container on a RO-RO and a Captain Morgan or a San Miguel had he to himself and the solitary come from the constant sway of a sailors so compact and social life, for here he reigned alone.

Sometimes in the past, she had found him there, slurring his words and leering at her, then she take him on a long walk and he'd eat a burger and sober up, and forget all the shame that he'd just delt her and then paradoxically he was all hers again.

A ragamuffin collection of port kids, played all around him in the weedy parking lot – Molly had been one of them, who happened to have the misfortune of starting to outgrow 'The Rats' first.

These underlings and tramps and cardsharks could find Jack, in a pinch because Rick had not seen Jack on deck yet and had called up Tim, worried because Jack had just broke up with his long time girlfriend, Bonnie.

"Molly." Tim had knocked on her door awaking her still in bed. "Do you know where Jack is right now?"

“Not at Lola’s? No? Bonnie’s? Um… No? Okay,” she heaved herself out of bed, “I’ll go down to East Village then.” She got a move on it, a mission to help Jack; all which made her feel a bit useful towards her strict chief step-father.

“It’s still a bit dark, so be careful, Mo… No, I better drive you.”

“No, chief, it’s quicker my way, on my bike, really.”

He had sighed for she was right, and she was never seeming to grow up too much. Clank, clank, clank; off on her rusty cycle, she left, before Mama would know her of her mission and scold, scold, scold.

And so she had peddled the street once more; her tracks echoed in the midst - in fog and gloom of the early morning hungover seatown. The foghorn moaned as she searched for him, again, her sometimes occluded sailor Jack.

She stumbled across Kealonnis before she could find Denny and with some despair, she parked the cycle and entered. Kealoni “Kinky” Fitui sleepily waved 'come in.' She knew Mol’s purpose to her rumpled business place and well, Molly knew lie drunk and sleeping wrecks litter her saloon… beyond a red silken veil...

“He is not ‘ere, Mo.” the bass cigarette-stained voice in pidgeon, Island English. “Try da Fog Bank Saloon. Or,” and she laughed heartily “behind it in the ditch!”

“I already did - it's morning, Keiloni.”

“Well, so it is, luv." She said, lazily scratching at her kinky hairline with long fat fingers and looking out moldy window panes with bleary eyes.

Mo glanced upwards, in a little smarmy room above this one, one could now hear faint rhythmic creaking of the floorboards and, believe it or not, Molly had probably even gone up there another time on a port errand or hunt. Keiloni followed her eyes.

“Jack’s not here, luv.” And then her pudgy face moved into a leering grin. “You want up? ”

“Ha! Ha!… you know I’m a girl.”

And then her eyes filled with her disdain of the girl!“You don’t dress like one.” She pointed her fat index finger to Molly’s baseball shirttails hanging below her sides.

“Not here.” Mo said. Not here! No. Not ever!

“Why not, Mo? Afraid your stepdaddy might make you start acting like a lady?”

“Something like that.” she admitted a well-worried thought and Keiloni laughed richly, for they had somehow spoken along these lines before.

“And what’s wrong with being a lady?”

Mo looked around at such place that she was in and raised eyebrows and cocked neck. “What is right with it?”

Keiloni laughed the merry laugh of a monarch. “Here a woman can be her own queen.”

“Now it is my turn to laugh!”

“Laugh all you want, but nature will have d' final answer.” Almost Octopus-like, an arm snaked out and knocked the cap off Mo’s head, sending her hair down all over. For she had stuffed her hair under her ol’ Padres ballcap. Keiloni gasped, as Mo stuffed it back under my cap, for it was long and full from being undercapped, it belying her pretense and feigned indifference of her sex.

“Why don’t you like being a girl?” she asked, serious, for once.

“Being a girl is so boring.” she squirmed, for how could she tell anyone here or anywhere the pleasure that she had in having the run of the port at almost any hour, speaking to whom she liked, hiding from her stern stepfather, playing out any pyratical fancy with the rats ..but, best of all: keeping up with her best buddy Quarter Master First Class Jack McCracken now off the *USS Champaign*. There was something else though she didn't realize at the time, hiding under that cap protected her from that contagious WestPac fever -- for it kept her ambiguous and so innocent from the whiles of sailors... and of men.

Port life sure beat high school – up town - which was so full of clicks and peer pressure that she had longago abandoned any kind of friendships at school. Gosh, she was so different with her daydream head filled up with stories and she had a pack of five kids to play out every daydream with her..And these were her friends. But she also had Bonnie, the elegant, who chopped hair 'round the corner from their loft-home, who loved to dispense to Molly, most especially, the wisest of jewels of hardwon knowledge. No, the port, the fleet, on the seedy side, had so befriended she.

"Then why you ain' cut yer hair!" Keilonni's almond eyes searched Mo with questions unasked of herself.

“I must find Jack.” Her fidget underneath her stare cascaded that rich, full laugh, again. “Bye!” Bolting down the creaking, rotten, wooden stairs, Molly escaped away from her deep mirth, which filled and almost shook the old house. She came to the street, relieved from the stale rum odor, realizing Keiloni was still drunk, and Molly swore out loud a favorite saying of Rick's: “Never - ever trust a lush!”

She looked in the window panes of her sleepy house and tucked every hair back in its place, saying “Besides, I am too busy to be a girl” for the port was her port. Not an inch, inside or out, was there that she had not touched, nor played

in, nor seen some sort of drama in, nor spied on... whether on the quay, or the kitchen of Mr. Lee's Chinese Restaurant, to the ships moored in the harbor; to play pyrates, bigkid that she was. She had played in every inch of the port - her playground, thus, she knew most every ship moored, she knew most every regular Captain, every regular mate.. knew most every creature bigger than a rat, every cat, every dog, every cardshark, every drunk...

But, if the port was hers, why! it seemed to dance for Jack. His presence filled downtown with a spirit of revel, palpable like a fogbank's thick incense; for he was warm in spirit, knew most folks by first name, and considered your blight through eyes that had seen the bleakest tragedy at sea. *He cared for them, because his care was his cross, his penance... and of his guilt as sharp as a beer bottle broken.*

The power of inclusion worked its strong charms and so, they all loved him...for he brought them together..he made them one in Libertytown. He stood poster-Sailor lean- narrow long back, narrow hips, tattoos on arms. He had almost an overdose in smarts and looks, but why Molly really liked him most because he was her buddy of sorts-- when he wasn't drinking, that is.

When he was gone they were so lonely and lost without him as the masts of the Shelter Island harbor clanged in chime to her feelings of exile and aimlessness - of Jacklessness. Even Danny Faegen sang to me once at the keys: "When's Sailor Jack a'coming back?"

But, in her Jack-brooding outside of Keiloni's she hadn't even noticed the 'Portrats' scampering around her. The Rats? Well, they were that pack of little kids who were, in contrast to the wretched tramps nearby, so innocent; and they were Mol's friends, though much younger than her; who lived near the tracks and whom the endlessly inventive Denny had nicknamed: Mol, Marmit, Sharkey, Fang, Lollypop and Flea. "Come on Mol! We're playing 'hide-n-seek in the shipyards!" This offer hardly tempted her for these five had no idea of life at all 'cuz they had no worries, no cares, just play, play, play! She had been like them recently until Jack had come back on the *Connie* and had been re-assigned here a few months back to this nuke frigate The *USS Champagne* in the yards: back on mission for Molly.

"Come on Mo.. Stop being old!" Lolly interrupts these recollections of hers. The runt Sharky was by her side sing-saying:

"Molly and Lolly, back t'find Jack."

She shook my head at the runt, cuz she hated her full name..it was too girlish.

“Mol, I’ll tell you where Jack is if you play with us.” She bribed, for being only twelve... ah, but she was sharp.

“Okay, once he's shipboard.” She threw back. "Well?"

“He’s at Joe's Grill.” She announced dramatically.

“Thanks.” She turned away, that could take some time, she thought.

“Don’t forget your promise!”

The whole street had smelt of rum and beer and she felt lost in its vapors while a moving background of intransients stepped to a cadence of delirium. She had found him before unconscious behind a Hann Jinnh container, on his chest with his head sunk in his arms like an infant peacefully and innocent looking there in the morning sun peacefully, rays making his waves sparkle in the sun, in his winter blue crackerjacks, lined with piping of olden seafaring... A pint of Captain Morgan Rum had laid before him glittering in the sun, with the Captain himself smirking a swashbuckler's unlawfully proud smile.

But, back to the now…

Knowing all alleys, bike paths and parking lots, she shortcutted through hotel courtyards, skipping to downtown, where soon a scent trail of sizzling onions and garlic frying in oil tickled her sinuses, and warmed up her spirits that the fog and the old worries had so softly overdampened. Drizzle and fog - such were San Diegan summers, early morn - dense and uncomprehindable 'till midmorning sun broke through the mute overcast, and delivered a golden Californian day.

Bonnie had just dumped Jack and they were on edge about him, watching him over like a seahawk for the times when he became so unbegotten.

But soon she heard a small throng of men in uproar laughter, a sound warm of inviting spirits like the scent that beckoned her to the grill and so she rounded the back alley in stealthy catlike approach, auspiciously wondering just what in the world would await me now on the turn of the corner.

Alas she saw him… the greasy windows tinted the scene of the grill into sepia colors as if from an old vintage movie or WWII movie, as if it occurred in a different time and place, like the WestPac itself -- so belonging to their Jack. And, thank God, his long back facing her, stood straight and unbent by the drink and a long white apron was tied around his slender waist. He strutted around the grill in his bell bottom uniform pants, with t-shirt, rolled up sleeves to reveal his green mermaiden and Trident tattoos on shoulders. While he cooked she could see he gestured with the spatula and animatedly entertaining this group of men with teasing and anecdotes, for he could always carry-on like that, skillet in hand and jokes on tongue. Already the coffee had singed the fishermen's stomachs and they talked loud and boisterously joking to Jack across the grill and he piped back answers that made them all alaugh. He didn't seem too upset about things. Perhaps today she could just talk to him for a few minutes about…

Then she saw her stepfather sitting like a stovepipe fixture at the bar, sat Tim, already in khakis reading the '*Navy Times*' beating her to finding Jack for once. Suddenly she realized Tim caught her staring in the windows at Jack and he had a stare that could unnerve any recruit; and feeling suddenly stupid and gangly for standing outside gawking, in Molly came, abashed.

"Molly, you can go home now, I found him." Tim hit her up right away when she came in pointing to Jack with the end of his cigar.

"Okay, but I'm hungry now." She cried which caused that sigh of his, again, perhaps for more expenses for a daughter that wasn't even his. He was chewing on the end the cigar and looking her up and down. Mol's shirttails displeased him as much as dustballs on a deck. His eyes looked puffy and she was annoyed by them as usual and his ample berth spilled over his polished brass belt buckle--but - with the guts of a tough Navy Chief.

"Hello Molly!" Jack brightened when he saw Molly standing there before his cousin, like a fresh recruit and he strode over to their place on the bar. He gave her a smile – ah… his little buddy, Mol… His extra-cheerfulness warmed her up real goodlike "You're out early, girl." she told 'em.

"Yep, let me getcha some grub, Mol." She heaved herself on barstool, next to Tim, shoulders releasing heavy in relief at seeing Jack so fit and realizing that she had become really, hungry. She saw Jack spied across the grill me ravenously taking in his food.

"You both thought I tied one on last night didn't you?" Jack said while glancing at her from the corner of his eye, while he cooked and 'turned to' smartly, extending long arms to reach a cast iron pan on the top shelf, plunking it down with panache on the fire and tossing in more sizzling fragrant onions.

"Well, I did hear the shore patrol sirens and lots of scampering about in the streets." Molly said while keeping Tim to the corner of her eye, who sighed while crinkling through the Tribune's sports-section. Both he and Mama didn't like Molly's Jackwatch so much, but little could they do for much past held him to her.

"Naw, I am just filling in for Craterface. Sorry you guys got up so early to look for me for nothing."

"You gave us a turn Jack…" Tim griped. "Again."

"Sorry to disappoint you, 'Cuz', but I'm as sober as can be."

"For once."

"Oh come on! You were feeling good the other night too, Tim."

"Yeah, but I can get to work on time, Jack!"

"Yeah, that's because you never leave it."

"Ha. Ha. Speaking of work, that's where I need to be, right now instead of looking for your butt all the time in town."

"Well, look, Chief, breakfast is on me."

"It better be." Tim snapped but dug in the chow aggressively, but he had a slight smile on his face as he chowed down.

He always seemed too tough with Jack, she thought, but she looked over to Jack and he had smiled and as if reading her thoughts he shook his head 'no'.

And he served up Tim his pancakes with real butter and crunchy bacon, and as he did so and secretly sticking his gut out mimicking Tim, which caused her to choke to hold back her sudden laugh, while she could feel Tim's eyes burning into her cheeks as if he knew, and he probably did. But she focused fully on her food and Tim went back to baseball stats, sighing.

And Jack served her favorite – French toast with eggs sunny side up on top. He smiled when she poked the yokes and dug in.

Tim went to the head and she had him to herself for a second. "Gees, Jack!" and he laughed too heartily holding onto the counter.

"I almost choked on my toast! Don't do that again!"

And he stuck his gut out again and they laughed together in great conspiracy. "Oh, gees, that was too funny!"

For a second she longed to talk to him of her real father, but, he pulled out his wallet from his back pocket conspiratorily.

"Check this out, Moll."

"It's a key, Jack, for what?"

"A most beautiful yacht." his greens eyes sparkled.

"You're kidding me, a yacht? What for?"

"Someone thinks I could drive their little boat around for them – when I feel like it - that is."

"No kiddin' Jack. Who is it?"

"A very rich man, who happens to like me, Mol. It's all about connections, Moll, never forget that – It's not what you know, but who you know." and he deftly tucked away the key when Tim stepped out of the head.

"A secret from Tim?" she asked catching this.

He laughed "You don't miss much, do you, Molly?"

Not when it comes to you, she thought and she wondered who the girl was – perhaps he was back with Penny? What about Bonnie? How come they always broke up so much? Whoever this girl was, she had money, that's for sure.

And she became more curious as she watched him, who was behind that twinkle of in his eyes? And she worried for him to not run into Steele again, and place bet after bet – though they were for poor Jezzy's school, the man seemed to seethe with hatred for him, and little *Molly'd:*

Find out why –
Why, if she'd just kept an eye,
On her wayward sailor Jack.

Bonnie and Jack Break up

For, a few weeks before this, Bonnie had gone searching with Molly to look for him in the town somewhere. Molly observed that Bonnie that day had seemed tense and aggressive, she carried herself so unlike the kind Bonnie she had known for years. But she had been a few blocks back crying and had stopped in a restaurant for a napkin to wipe her eyes. They'd found him half face down on a back couch of his friend Joe Favalora's Restaurant 'Mermaiden's Delight.'

Molly shook his arm gently and he turned over and saw Bonnie standing over him and sat up immediatley sensing trouble.

"Jack, what are you doing here?"

"Um, well I thought I'd relax a bit in town." He said scratching his head - he had no rest there at his rack on his ship, with announcements over the 1MC ever few minutes or so. He looked up and saw Bonnie standing there with her arms crossed and rubbed his eyes to get them working.

"What's up Bon?" he said scratching his head and yawning.

"Me! Looking for you again in the port!"

"Oh, Bon, sometimes I can't sleep aboard ship, you know that…"

"Nor drink on ship either." She stamped her heal.

"Well.." his face was lined from the creases on the couch.

"I CAN'T keep worrying about you Jack, all the time I worry and I'm tired of it!"

"Well, then don't." he'd told her rubbing his eyes. She'd looked at Molly shaking her head and Bon began to cry. "You can't tell me to stop worrying about you, Jack!"

Gunny O'meara had asked her out the other day when Bonnie and Molly had gone shopping in the Horton Plaza Mall. But she had loved Jack – *they all did*.

"You're making us all worry about you and suffering." She said "...like Molly…"

He got up and poured himself from Joe's drip on the counter. "Now Bonnie, I want you to leave Molly out of this."

"I will" she said, "But you be careful Jack."

"Of what?" he demanded.

"Not to break her heart as you have mine!"

Molly blushed deeply, "Bonnie! Jack's only like an uncle to me!" And Bonnie was like a big sister. In fact the two were more like parents to her and this scene was like a divorce to poor Molly who'd already lost her real father.

"I know it." She said looking squarely at Jack. "But I'm talking about the booze." Her English wasn't perfect, but Molly knew what she meant.

She grabbed her purse. Jack lunged after her and grabbed her arm. “Now wait Bonnie… I’ll… cut down on the booze…”

“No! You said that last time!” she flung him off.

He threw his hands up in discouragement, or was it despair?

“So long Jack.” She said. He looked up at her in sharp surprise.

“Molly, you want to come with me?” she asked, but she already knew Molly would stay by him like a loyal mutt so she turned away without an answer.

And she left Molly there alone with him feeling intensely embarrassed for Jack’s sake. He walked to the window and watched Bonnie walk away. She was exceedingly beautiful - her mother was born near the base in Andalusia’s port, Rota. He sighed and sat down and stared hard into the vault of his black coffee as if it would tell him of things, like a toy Eight Ball. He had been with Bonnie all of this tour so far and some of the last one in Yokusuka. And little was said to this surprising tragedy. And he rubbed his forehead and looked out to sea. His suffering was very dignified and Molly's throat tightened in the bittersweet scene she'd just been thrust into – into the inner antechamber of Jack's big, but broken, heart.

“Oh well Molly, at least I still have you...” he joked, but his eyes were wide watching his girl walk out on him, for good.

Then suddenly he looked bewitched and he clinched his fists; perhaps he would be cruising for a fight...with just anyone or maybe with O'Meara? This perplexity of his pain she sensed so deep in her Jack. He jumped up and grabbed a beer from his friend’s frig, which scared her – Joe may not like that. But, even worse he would probably be soon buying a bottle of Captain Morgan and disapeering for days by the underpasses or railyards. This is the Jack so very few saw.

“Oh, Jack, don’t do that again!” she cried.

“Just go home Molly.” He snapped.

She looked at him his mouth was so grim and he chugged the beer right down, his adam's apple moving up and down while taking in the poisen deeply. And she began to just weep as she watched it going into him once again.

“Oh, no, not you too, Molly!”

“Yes, I have to!” she looked him in the eye, tears streaming down her face.

“What?” he crushed the can in his big hands and through it across the room where it clanked loudly into a metal trash can.

“I have to cry *for* you.”

“Why!” he was mad enough to clinch his fists, though he didn’t realize it at the time.

“Because you can’t cry yourself!”

"Don't do that, Molly. I'm not worthy of it." He said, his eyes suddenly turning to sadness.

"Yes, you are, so just stop it!" and now she clinched her fists as she had since she was a little girl when he had wanted to drink and drink to no end.

"Alright girl, let's just go home." He conceded to the little fists and to the tears. And they walked a long ways in silence to the trolley, which would take them to uptown. She looked up to him, he was far away, smoking a puff or two. She's seldom been just in time to save him from a major drinking bout. From observations of a lifetime she she would look for the veering of the windvane – whose rooster beak pointed offshore and when the terrors would be enclosing upon him again and she'd go looking just everywhere in the seedy port to find him and try to save him from them.

But under her watch – the Jackwatch – he seemed safe, little did she know - because of an oldtime promise, a promise to a buddy fallen a long time ago, in the WestPac and a half a world away.

Denny's

He stopped before Denny's Waterline Tavern he looked sharply at Molly, "Just one at Denny's."

She would try to look at Jack like her mother would – she'd tried to scowl, to plead, to moan, to fuss… whatever worked. But this time he went on in before she could react. He did what he liked despite the Navy; *he was too free like the Santa Ana winds that rushed through the deep scrub valleys in the lust for the open sea.*

And suddenly Molly was acutely sad, although she herself had not lost Bonnie.

Ah… Bonnie the great. She mused to herself as they walked in and were greated by Cat the waitress and sometimes part time girlfriend, too. *Ah, Bon, the beaute and the great love he would not have…*

"Jack!" Denny cried and broke out in a piano salvo he launced at him:

"Jack! Jack!
On the railway tracks!"
Oh! Jack, Jack
On the railway tracks!"
When he's a'drinking
He's not a'thinking

Of the train a'coming
Along his back!"

"Don't remind me." Jack waving him off. Denny, Bonnie and Molly had pulled him off of them once, long ago."Hit me up, Cat." He straddled the barstool.

"I know about Bonnie." She said bringing him a opened San Miguel, for Bon was her hair dresser and friend, too.

"What's this - was it in on the news." He mumbled to his bottle.

Denny jumped off the piano bench and hobbled over to Jack's stool on the bar. "What's wrong Jack."

"Broke up with my girl." And they drunk up.

"Sorry about that Jack. She was a beaute Bonnie was."

Jack broke the topic with a wave and discussed Padres baseball trades at length and Molly had slipped away to tinker at the piano keys – she'd learned to play 'Fur Elise' after three weeks practice on Denny's piano after school. but she did hear him say: "It's not the girl, Denny – It's the darn Navy."

"The Navy??"

"All the RIFting - Reductions in Forces."

"Worried?"

"I've got three Article 15s and two Captains masts in my service jacket."

"So…"

"This isn't the oldstyle Navy anymore Denny – that's stuff we did in the Vietnam era… how can I think about having a girl with all that going on?"

"I think Bonnie'd understand…"

"No." he rubbled his head. "God, Denny, what in the world am I going to do with myself? I don't know anything but the dang Navy."

"You'll be alroit, Jack. Look at me." Denny had lost his merchant mariners license after a drunken crash. And what Jack saw before him, that he hid from his friend with his squinting eyes, was that though Denny was only fourty he looked like a drunken broken old bum of fifty-five – but at least Denny could play the piano well. What could he do besides the Nav? Ah, he could drink really good too!

"Ah… here's the perfect man for you Jack." Denny said while polishing up some mugs. "It's Jimmy Give-God-a-Try McIntyre and his dawg 'Spot.'"

"Hey Denny," Jimmy said gruffly but unoffended "Her name is Ruby."

"Ruby-dooby." Denny said reaching over to pet her.

"Wooof!"

He pulled up a barstool alongsides Jack.

"Jimmy-man, there's no dogs allowed."

"Says who?"

"Says the owner – Me!"

And Jimmy sat his little princess right on a barstool next to him.

Ruby lifted her head assertively and bayed a plaintive "Whoooof!" to Denny.

"A customer!" Denny laughed and handed her a doggy treat already in his hands. "Oh, well, Ruby's not a dog; she's a girl."

"She's his girlfriend." Bluto teased him and the other regulars laughed too.

"Can it." Jimmy hit back good naturedly, for he seldom ever seen without his beagle. She even rode with him when he'd had his own dumptruck.

"Diet Coke coming up." Denny said dispensing Jimmy the drink and slid it down to him on the bar. "The *Real Hard* Stuff."

"How's the Nav treating you Jack?"

"Uh… well they're RIFting a lot of folks these days."

"Worried?"

"Yeah…"

"Just give God a try." Denny teased, standing by them polishing a shotglass.

"Exactly." Jimmy said looking around to everyone. "Hey, look guys, He still hears prayers, guys, even in bars."

"Then you can say one for me." Jack muttered to his beer.

"Why don't you talk to the 'Old Man' yourself."

"Cuz I don't think he's listening anymore."

"That's just in your head, Jack."

"Whatever."

"Jack," he leaned forward and was almost whispering, "They always say in AA that when you hit bottom, you'll stop drinking. But what they don't say is that that bottom can keep on dropping – into the very pit of Hell."

Jack took a long swig of beer to this and Jimmy watched him sighing: "Well, I can only hope it doesn't sink too deep before you get out."

At home they'd found Tim had pulled up a card table in front of the TV - Padres game, smoking, drinking coffee and doing reports and she could see they were okay together and Molly had left him with her stepfather in charge and she went upstairs to read. Later she could hear more people downstairs, including the wild wicked laugh of her mother when drinking and shooting pool. and young sailors, the many friends of Jack. She saw him waving as he stood there getting deeply drunken – and a flush of shame – how deeply embarrassing this was to see her

hero, again, so fallen and she fell asleep to the party sounds in the garage downstairs, not an uncommon noise for Moll.

Hangover

In the morning she ventured downstairs it was so quiet, which meant both of her parents were sleeping off hangovers. Molly was the only one who never drank in the house, nor had she even thought of it yet, only being seventeen, for she was in her own eyes, very much still a kid. And Jack was like a great big uncle who'd been in her life since ever she could remember.

She was fascinated by him, though she knew not why and into the den she crept, opening the door with a click and took a step into the darkness - a sequestered cacoon around him, mixed with cigarette smoke, stale beer and the musk of an early San Diegan morn.

She almost felt his eyes lock upon her in the dark, then Groping for the light she switched it, hearing his groan.

"Jack." She whispered finding him on the couch wrapped in an array of tangled blankets his big arms flung over his face and his eyes peeping out from under them in a kind of terror. But then he saw her tray holding a tall mug of piping black coffee, aspirin, toast and a jug of water – his usual.

"My angel!" he cried flinging off the blankets and sitting up, grabbing the mug and sipping, while Molly giggled a little.

"Better?" she asked sitting beside him on the couch.

He sat up straighter. He looked rough, he only had his tank top and bluejeans on and lines criss-crossed his puffy face like a Naval chart but then he smiled after the first burn of coffee hit him.

"I'm dealing, girl. Ah! Nice n'hot 'Lifer's Juice!'" he toasted her with the mug and sipped it up. "Black and acrid, just like I like it."

"Of course, for my favorite Uncle Ja-ck."

He smiled and poked at her side "Love ya, kiddo." And she giggled; he could be so easy to put right sometimes. She thought perhaps today was the not day she could ask him some of the questions she longed for to pose – about her long lost father. Or, at least to ask why no one ever spoke of him, ever.

He stretched again, suddenly happy as all kids made him, almost purring. One would have never guessed that he just lost his girl. Maybe he just didn't want one?

"Kinda of partied last night, didya?" She teased.

"Yeah, gees. Sure did."

"What time you went to bed?"

"Um, I don't even know." He sipped more. He rubbed his eyes with his big fists, like a great big kid.

"Who all came over?"

"Oh, Rick, Craterface and Flipchart and a couple of others from the *Kitty Hawk.*"

"I thought I heard some fighting."

Molly found herself tense about this, fearing her stepfather was getting tired of the constant partying at his own house that Jack brought on since he'd come back from Asia six months ago. And what about the Navy? Wasn't he worried about that, too?

"We wrestled around a little bit last night on the lawn." He laughed at himself "Can you believe someone called the shore patrol and boy was Tim mad at us and, but he knew it was just a little bit of therapy, y'know, rough housing…"

"Therapy? Cuz of Bonnie?" she pried recklessly, for Jack hated such questions.

"Yeah, kiddo." He avoided her eyes. She poured him more coffee.

"She was something else…." He said quiet to the coffee cup, at last.

"I know, I'm sad about it too."

He glanced at her sharply. "Don't be. It's for the best."

"What?? Jack, don't you think…"

"Ach!" he groaned getting up, swaying, he towered many feet over her sitting there and went into the head, slamming the door and she heard him go, red with embarrassment for him, for it was loud and unpleasant sounding. Something more struck her as the other times when she'd accidently overheard men go, overcome with the difference between men and women. They seemed to be much more beastlike to her, just then. She never used that head in the garage downstairs, for the scat of men turned her stomach.

Then he came out, completely unaware of Molly's acute embarrassment and flung himself down on the couch behind her and his green eyes showed like gems without any of this unrefined quality and he grinned sheepishly at her. "Moll, get me the remote will ya, doll?" He flicked on the game in time to get the Padres first at bat. "Ah! He groaned, but in delight. And he suddenly looked happy as a heck.

'Y'know, maybe all's he wants to be home and alone with us', she thought – she hoped.

The Den door opened then and Molly tensed up.

Tim came downstairs to find Molly sitting on the edge of the Jack's old couch. "Molly!" he barked.

As if continuing a conversation Jack said "...besides Tim, nuthin's going to please her 'cept diamond rings and babies cries."

"Yeah that's Bon for you." Tim said, motioning like a symphony conductor but with wide demanding eyes for Molly to get

up and move her rear over to the chair *PDQ*! Then he turned to racked up the balls eyes wide on Jack the whole time.

"She's very marriage minded." Jack stretched on the couch luxuriently like a cat withn't a care in the world. And Molly nodded emphatically.

"I betcha she will have a pack of at least three kids."

"Me too."

Molly would remember these prophetic words years later, upon a visit to Bonnie and all her brood at isthmus of Parris Island, South Carolina.

Tim glanced at him a half second longer than he would have and Jack picked up on this. "What? What?"

"Someone's after her." Tim said chalking up the cue stick. Molly herself had told Tim about meeting Gunny O'Meara in the Mall.

"I already know about it." He said sitting up lacing up his boondockers. "It's Gunny O."

"You do?"

"Yeah – Sean likes her."

"Sean?"

"Gunny O'Meara, Tim." He said."My long time friend from the *Hawk*."

"The boxer guy from the Smoker?"

"Yeah."

"You know, then?" Tim said astounded.

"Yeah, he was cool about it. He came to my quarterdeck last weekend saying that he liked her and wondered why was I leaving her all alone last weekend."

"You let her go Jack!" Molly uttered, strickened, the world wobbled wrongly.

"No, It's eval season Molly, and we also worked the whole weekend - Bon knows that. But it was bound to happen anyway."

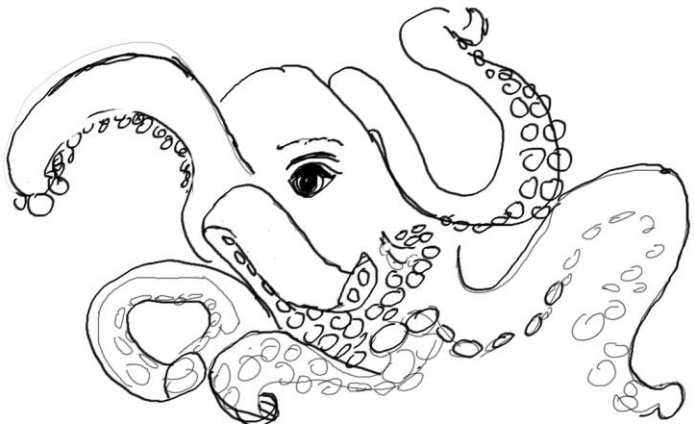
But Moll, young as she was, knew him far better than that – Jack had known and respected O'Meara for many years by now – and who better to care of his Beautiful Bonnie, than 'Fortress O'Meara?'"

"Jack, one of these days you'll want to settle down too..." said as he had for several decades now, his cousin fatherly his hands outstretched before him.

Jack went up to the table to break "Naw, I'm doomed to sail the seas alone." and he smiled and took aim and broke sending two high balls into the pockets and he turned around and saw Molly and Tim both standing there together stairing at him open mouthed, and took a prideful smile at his smug, solitary ways; for he needed no girl.

"Don't you want someone to *love* you, Jack?"

"They all do Cuz, they all do." And he took another swig.



The Yacht

"Let's go to Shelter Island, Jack." Penny said. She'd just picked her Daddy's vintage '69 mustang – that Jack loved. This scene was just a few weeks after Bonnie had left him, but Penny had been thinking about this move for two months.

"And do what?"

"Let's go to my Daddy's yacht."

"His *yacht*?"

"Yeah…"

"Won't he mind?"

"No, I go here all the time."

"To do what?" his head turned sharply on her.

"Mostly I study there, it's quiet."

But he shook his head in disbelief. He'd just started seeing her again after a two year break when he dated Bonnie. Of course all these years he was still seeing Lola – at his own whim, of course, and over the last decade or so a blonde Yeoman, Rosy on North Island, based at a squadron there.

He parked in the Marina. She was gleaming with satisfaction – she was about to show him her best card, when out of the blue a pack of kids came down the bike path and he threw all concerns aside.

"Jack!" They screamed in delight.

"It's the Rats! How are you guys?" he said greating them warmly.

"Where ya been, Jack."

"Out to sea – as usual."

And he teased and played with them and knew all their names one by one and ten minutes of this went by – she knew he was a very social person and she tried putting up with them, but soon

she began to feel strange standing there, tossed aside for a bunch of children!

He threw the little kid Sharkey up in the air, who giggled and giggled and she went into spoiled princess mode and began to walk down the quay.

"Wait, Penny." He said, but didn't stop playing for a long while and she was steamed, but he seemed to know he had some sort of hold on her and she didn't dare move a foot further towards the yacht. And Finally he wound it up

And, in relief, she lead him down the pier to a forty foot sail boat. She could see his eyes go wide open with disbelief while she showed him all the compartments in the boat.

"Damn, you guys are rich." He said.

"How about a beer." She interrupted his reverie.

"Yeah…" he was still looking about. He followed her into the well-stocked bar that had every rum, tequila, brandy and vodka one could possibly want for a yearlong cruise!

"He entertains a lot of bigwigs here." She said. "He practically writes off the entire thing every year.

"Damn." Jack said. He had been audited by the IRS recently for some taxes on his winnings and was still making heavy back tax payments and this fact was – unbelievable, even outrageous! He chugged down the beer in one gulp thinking about this too much about it. She giggled at this and went in the frig to get him another.

"Thanks, Luv." He said, going to the taffrail to gaze out. He leaned on the rail where he tried to see his ship in the distance off 32nd street Base and the LPO in him subconsciously checked the time to see if his guys had hauled down the colors for the evening. But he could not see it, it was too far away.

She wondered where he was - he just gazed at the ships. Was it a girl that had his heart in lockdown - or - one of these ships?

He sighed as he looked.

"Well, it's about time I got you to myself – sort of."

"How do you mean?"

He was in a tank top that showed off his tattoos. She'd never had dated a guy with tattoos before and he was getting pretty hard to not just fall and fawn over. The yacht was a favorite place of Penny's to party, and of course bring guys. And she felt more on her turf to bring up the subject, finally. She had gritted through enough days of neglect and she was ticked.

"Does she have to do everything with us?"

"She? Who?"

"Molly."

"So…"

"Yeah, I mean, I haven't had a second alone with you since that first time."

"Well, now, Penny, I told you about her."

She'd hoped he wouldn't get defensive, for it was a simple request afterall.

"She's basically my Goddaughter and I watch over her." He said, grinning to himself thinking of it – on this trip to the beach this time he'd be telling the kid story after story about guys now, and it was great fun explaining to her the various stories he knew of guys: like how one airman in OA division had three different girls knocked up at the same time! Or a shipmates, a second class that was dating a female commander. Or, even he, himself had lived with nurse/lieutenant girl friend Amanda in the P.I. He'd been saving up such stories even before this cruise back from Japan, enjoyably hearsing them sometimes to himself when he stood mid-watches and was bored out of his mind in the middle of the Pacific and wanting to be the leader, the story-teller that he always was back home he'd found a rapt audience in the kid along with her mother, Flo who chimed in at every turn in a riotous and hysterical way: "See Molly! You gotta watch out for these cats!"

"Yeah but…" Penny broke these thoughts and was annoying his pseudo-father role. "We always have her with us." She snarled.

"It's funny Bonnie never had a prob with it." He said upending another beer on his lips, nor had Amanda having Jezzy over often. This girl is spoiled rotten. She ain't for me, man.

"Look, she's getting older now, and…"

"And you're just jealous."

"Oh come on Jack! How would you like it if I brought my young brother with us everywhere we went."

"I'd probably like it - no kidding, Penny." He said looking away across the bay to North Island Naval Air Station. A few F-18s were taking off in the distance. He idly wondered how one of his old pals, Landers, was doing over there – and his AG2 at the control tower. He should go and see them again sometime, Landers always had thousands of stories he'd tell to the pilots while giving weather briefs and he was as amusing as a bartender standing at the bar where they briefed the charts that the cute AG2 fetched for him left and right. Jack used to tease him by giving him a rag with a glass to polish as he yakked. He was always glad to see Jack and he wanted to go there right now, and loose this spoiled girl.

She was loosing control and going into "Ultra-bitch Mode" a favorite term of her deeply tanned tennis-playing mother.

"…with us - Everywhere?" she said incredulous, mouth gaping. Really, this was too much!

"I love kids Penny." He said idly looking across the bay, smoking, remembering much… Mom had taught him that – to be kind to kids and in fact he'd actually learned German entirely from the streets kids on his block when they had lived over there for years.

He closed his eyes while he was drinking off the rim… remembering them… remembering much.

Then before him in his mind in the cobblestone alley was when he was fourteen and walking the streets alone a ten year old Heike screeming to him 'Yack! Die WindJammers sind kommen! Die Windjammers!!' Ah, she'd said 'Wint Yammer' and but for this little Maedchen he and the other kids had walked all the way down Rickmers Strasse and had seen a line of ten masted sailing ships enter the estuary right then bound for the Havenfest moorings!

Ah… What a sight was that!

He knew he had forever changed after that! It was a great annual gathering and celebration of the Hansiatic League – of twenty masted ships from all over the world and a seafest he was to be a part of for the next few years in port – even going to sea on one Polish ship a year later when he had turned fifteen. Ah! Die Windjammers! Such an awesome sight as they paraded down the Weser River in full sail in front of them and he'd gotten his love of the sea that very moment!

Penny watched him looking far off, wondering if he had a kid out there that he was thinking about, or perhaps another girl – or two! He was way out there and far off and her attempts to get him to talk were lost on him. He could be so enigmatic to her at times…

"… I *Love Kids*…" was echoing in Penny's poor head too right then and there and they went straight to her tummy – a most secret place in a woman warmed by such words, of babies, kids, family, home, and well… marriage. She was glowing now thinking almost in a miraculous way and her mouth was now gaping open at these thoughts and feelings deep to her satisfaction and intense surprise.

He finally returned from his reveree and glanced over at her, seeing this and suddenly he was enjoying her again. He leaned back, still watching, smiling and drank another beer straight down and began to laugh at her.

"What's so funny?"

"Penny are you needing a bit of attention -- if you know what I mean." He said just barely keeping the broad smile down to a minimum, trying not to be too obviously the player that he certainly knew that he was.

She could say nothing and so he knew it. And now he was backing her up to the ladder below "Why didn't you just say so

girl? I don't have an apartment or anything like that Penny and I can't just check into a hotel everytime I want to … you-know."

Ah! So that was the only problem! But Penny's father had many places to frolick around with including a place deep down in Baja, and this time she was really determined and thus she'd found her battleground - to win over the untameable Jack.

She looked up with a shy little smile that pleased him much and he grabbed her hand, tugging her belowdecks. "Ah… Come on cupcake." He was breathing in her ears and she felt the thrill of a lifetime come upon her.

Afterwards he sat up in bed with his arms behind his back and staired at the full bar stacked in the next compartment. She was still shaking, but alert as a cat, somehow about this guy. She saw him gulp and then he looked at the bed and the messy crumpled sheets.

"Gees, Penny, don'tcha think your Dad is going to get a bit ticked?"

"Naw, he won't notice." She was stretching out now like a cat ready for a nap.

She didn't even care to hide this fact? He tried to process that chunk of information. She did not seem to be the studious type either, but to be from another decadent world and he couldn't figure out the values of that class, or if they had any to go by at all. So he decided to stick by something he hoped to claim as his own rules.

"Come on."

"What Jack?"

"I want to clean these sheets in the Marina Laundry."

"We don't need to Jack. Dad doesn't care."

He looked at the sheets. Not only were they crumpled but they had a slight earthy smell and he was mad at himself now, bordering on disgust.

"Well, fine, but I do."

He was sulking. He shouldn't have even come here, for he didn't even know what he was doing with her. Jack liked to please people but now he was terribly displeased himself. Imagine how despicable her father must think of him! A screen in his head showed Bonnie standing there, wringing her hands of him and his stomach ached in a sudden fit. Why was he always discarding his girls?

As they did the sheets and Jack sat at a card table and pulled out a pack – she first thought it was cigarettes and she sat on top the dryer which warmly reeled underneath her. Across from him she could see him in profile deal and redeal and while he shuffled the deck and reshuffled and pulled on a single cigarette he had stashed in his crumpled leather wallet. Amused

by this, she watched him moodily shuffle and shuffle and cut and dexterously perform card moves with dexterity for somehow with such large hands. He only grunted at her attempts to chat. What was in the back of his mind? Repeatitively the scenes of only a half hour ago went through her mind, over and over and she felt a flush come over her face at just the vivid feelings going through her mind. He seemed completely unaffected, in fact he seemed somewhat distant. He seemed full of himself and immovable by her charms and she was used to getting her way with every man she met - even her father. As she blatantly watched she swore she'd never met a more tough and manful character than Jack, and suddenly not getting her way every single darn time was incredibly sexy as she could have ever imagined. Why was that so?

Then he changed course and was talking to her again… amusing her with stories of other yachts he'd been on or around…and anecdotes from Navy ships he'd known…and ports-of-call in Asians seas. He told her about how he'd help moor a crony of Admiral Morrison's a ship three stories high of luxury that had moored up on base for a personal visit, who'd grabbed the young seamen tying his ship up for drinks after watch. He had had already a much bigger and richer life than she. Though he was not well off at all, he was wealthier of the world than she in a way that none of her friends and family were, and he carried himself that way too:

"Prince O'Libertytown" Denny had sung to him in jest one time after he'd come back in from an EastPac storm, and she could not compare anyone she knew to Jack, for he had what so few possessed, as Denny sang once: "He's had the pride of the piling seas to his wake."

"Hey Jack." Someone called from behind them. And he stood up and held out his hand to an older man some old men came around and before she knew it there was a little gang of older men about Jack sharing their own sea stories. She felt she'd always be sharing him with others.

Finally they folded up the dried sheets and with a winning smile to them, he packed up the laundry like a seabag slung over shoulder and they were walking back to the berth when she saw her father come down the gangway. "Dad!" she cried and Jack cussed sharply under his breath. "Damn!"

"Jack, don't worry so much, okay? Come over and meet him, will you?"

"Damn! He's gonna know I just did his daughter."

But when the father came around, he was very warm and friendly and didn't seem to notice the yacht's laundry bag hanging from Jack's shoulder. He was about fifty and impeccably groomed and dressed in the variety of dock clothes now

fashionable, rather casual and well, very expensive. But after a while Jack suddenly realized that he actually liked the man very much.

"So this is *the* Jack McCracken, I've heard so much about." He said grabbing Jack's hand very warmly. Obviously Penny had told her father about him already. Suddenly Jack felt very cornered.

"I'm Robert Chamberlain." Said he.

"I know." Jack said. He was in awe too much to be polite.

"Hey, why don't you come have a drink with me on my boat, Jack?" He was so very friendly and Jack agreed with some pleasure.

As Robert went to the Marina briefly Jack hoarsly whispering in Penny's ear "Make up the bed PDQ!"

"But Jack…"

"You don't listen to your guy do you?" he said savagely leaning forward his eyes wide open greens.

"Yes, Jack. I'm sorry." She had trouble seeing the urgency of this request, for she knew her father seldom went in that compartment except for when one of his girl friends was in town. But suddenly she 'turned to' it, trying to figure it all out as she made up the bed.

And he gave Jack a tour and Jack acted as if he'd never been there before.

"I make a great Margarita, Jack. How about one?"

"Sure!"

"How do you like my little toy, Jack?"

"Well, it's really something!"

Robert elegantly mixed and poured the drinks while chatting effortlessly about his yacht, and then he opened Jack up - like a can.

"I heard you're in the Navy, Jack."

"Yessir."

"Really? What do you do."

"Well, seamanship, navigation, etc."

"A quartermaster?"

"Yessir."

"I bet sailing this is little boat is nothing compared with your ship."

"Right." Jack agreed still looking around, his flattery had deserted him, for awe and Robert laughed warmly at him - "true this little yacht must seem terrible small next to the big ships of the Navy."

"Are you on a carrier?"

"I was – on the *Connie, the Kitty Hawk* and a few others TAD from time to time, but I'm now on the *Champagne* – it's a fast frigate."

"Dad, Jack's also been a sailor on a four masted sailing ship." Penny bragged.

"Three masted."

"Well, whatever, it was a tallship, right?"

"Right."

"Wow, Jack, where did you sail?"

"All around Northern Europe, mostly."

"I tell you what Jack, you should come out with us sometime on it." He said handing Jack the drink. "You could probably teach us a thing or two about sailing."

"Wow! Sure." He was broadly smiling now, amazed at the sort of man he was meeting. This guy probably was like the civilian equivalent of an admiral in the Navy – he was an exec at the shipyards of General Dynamics/Nassco and here he was drinking with him on his yacht!

And Jack and Robert talked a while and Penny sat there happy as a kid on Christmas Morn.

"You know" Robert said, "I've known about you for many years Jack. It's about high time I met you."

And Jack was crestfallen knowing what was next.

"…about that orphanage of yours." He was saying "…read about it in the Tribune a few years ago. I had my accountant donate some money as I remember." He'd given them five thousand dollars and Jack had posted it immediately to Chap who was on a trip in the PI.

"Yessir, I remember very well. I sent you a tax receipt and a thank you letter, did you get it?"

"Yes, I did. It was very neat to be a part of that effort."

"I was stationed in the P.I. at the time, so I sent you a letter, instead of thanking you in person."

"I know."

"We added another room with all that money. I bought the wood and stuff myself."

"I remember. That is just fabulous, Jack. I don't often get to meet young men of such quality these days."

Jack gulped a thank you.

"Everybody is out in their own world trying to get their own things. It's very refreshing seeing someone helping someone else out for a change."

"Oh." Jack said, suddenly acutely uncomfortable, and staired hard at the ice in the margarita. Robert stood up and started to fix him another. He was exceedingly tired of all that

praise - it was excrutiating by now. He had selfish motivation – he loved being a big hero to the kids, that's all. Nothing more.

"Jack," Penny nosed in "Why don't you like to talk about it when it's such a wonderful thing you've done…

"Penelope…" Robert scolded from over by the bar.

Jack sighed and feeling very caught told him the awful truth "Well, I guess because I haven't stopped drinking yet and I…"

The way too bolded of the article from the *Navy Times* many years ago still taunted him, glaring in his face for the entire fleet to see: "*Sailor combats alcoholism by helping the orphans of Olangapo after the death of his best friend...*"

As they strolled out Jack gathered some resolution mixed with margarita "Penny, I like your dad too much to mess around with his daughter. So I think it's better that we stop messing around…"

"Oh come on, Dad knows already."

"What!"

"He knows -- I could never keep anything from him."

"How does he know? Do you always tell your Dad whom your sleeping around with?"

"No." She didn't tell him that she'd had such a rosy cheeks and her Dad hadn't missed that 'Alright Penelope, who's the guy you're seeing?'

"He just knows me." She said.

"This is a different world." Jack said sighing and overcome by it.

"Oh, Jack, don't you worry so much about it." She pleaded holding onto his arm.

"Yeah, yeah." He sighed.

Sgt Mjr Moma

Tim's regular Navy Job had always been all consuming - he never seemed to be home and he was so tired and withdrawn when he was. He'd said several times, "I just want to go drink a beer on the beach." He missed his 'Agana Days' in Guam.

The myriad of details to do that obsessed Tim into the deep nights - "Flo, what did I get myself into!" he'd say coming home every night at 9 PM, having left home at 0500. She never said anything only putting a beer in his hand, as he came into the door, dinner on the table hot - which was like taking a million tons of shoulders off his back and he'd smile at her as if she were the pot of gold at the rainbow's end herself. By now they'd been married many years, but Molly still found her Mama fawning over him like a newborn bride. And he adored her – she was the only one in the world who could regularily put a warm smile on his rather dry face. Interestingly their obvious happiness with each is what drew many people to them and they were quite popular around town. Except Molly was left out of this loop somehow for her mother was never anything but unhappy with her and her make-believe world. And Tim, well Tim made her feel she was little more than a tax deduction, that annoyed him with any little bit of nonsense, of which an artistic person like Molly abounded in.

Mama's, her friends and Penny's world was so different than Jack and Molly's port world. For Mama, being feminine was their whole life. They took great pleasure in creating a beautiful hairstyle, a beautiful dress, a beautiful tablesetting a beautiful meal, a beautiful room, a beautiful house; and *it must have been a major disappointment for her mother to not be able to create a beautiful daughter*. But Molly took beauty in the port, its colorful, seedy sorts and no matter what her parents, especially her mother, did they could not take this out of Molly, because they could not take the 'Molly' out of Molly! For she was Of the port, and curiously Of Jack and his seadreams - his seabrood forever.

Tim finally took a week leave just to rest up, to lay to, play pool, ride his big Harley up and down the coast on the PCH Pacific Coast Highway and lay out on Ocean Beach with his wife. Flo finally poured out her vexation about Molly to him. Next to the problems of Tim's, her mother's insistence seemed unduly extravagant.

"Church is having a Charm School next week and Molly needs to go, because she doesn't have any manners, never wears nice clothes and never ever has a date! She's seventeen. She's in

the gaslamp too much with Jack and she doesn't have one girlfriend her age!! Why, when I was sixteen, Why! I went to the Navy Ball with my boyfriend.” Molly felt a stab of panic - Mama could date her at her age and yet she didn't even know how to smile at a boy in her typing class! 'Am I endlessly behind then??’ she asked herself. Was her lush imagination interfering with her maturing? Wow, she sure was the odd-one..and yet …and yet she was hiding from men troubles as well, she could clearly see looking back.

Molly’s eyes met Bonnie’s, who's held sympathy and a bond of understanding, for she’d bared her soul with Bonnie, and only she knew what this all meant to Molly. All this time she thought maybe Mama might make her start wearing a dress every day and with strict Tim standing there to back her up, lest she’d be 'out of uniform' - and be forced to wear it, day in and day out, and there goes her whole port life! But by focusing on only the immediate, though Tim inadvertently came to Molly’s rescue.

“When is this deal, Flo?”

“Next week.” She said nose still high with indignation.

“Then to the charm school she goes.” He said putting his coffee mug down like a judge’s gravel. Molly only felt great relief at not being forced to wear a dress like a girl *for the rest of her life*.

“Well, she will need a dress, gloves and the other fine attire.”

“Take her Saturday.”

“And some makeup." He got up, flicked open his wallet and handed her a few large bills - causing Molly’s jaw to drop in shame! Mama smiled at him in sudden relief and kissed him on the cheek right in front of Bonnie and Molly.

“Okay Flo.” He got up abashed, but with keen eyes surmised Molly’s position on all this. She sat at table with spoon in hand over her cereal, looking, well, at ease, which was not horrified as if he had radically altered her wardrobe forever! He seemed surprised at Molly’s equanimity, for still had in his hand a pirate book she'd been immersed into and tossed it too her with a laughing grunt. "Here's your pirate book."

'What did we have to do with each other?' she whispered to Bonnie conspiratorily.’

“That’s just your Daddy, Molly.”

“He’s not my Daddy.”

She raised her eyes “He raised you now over ten years, Molly.”

“So what.”

Tim had been many a year at sea - had it been over ten years now? But, she'd missed the one endearing thing, about this incident, in looking back years later, on her own immaturity - that wad of money was Tim's for a daughter that wasn't even his.

"Well I heard from the sisters in Olangapo." Jack told Mama one quiet evening sitting on the barstool shuffling his deck. He seldom spoke with his family about that though they, too were regular sponsors of the children overseas – giving around five big ones every tax return season.

"Well, how is the orphanage?"

"Good." He said "I've got to get over there again, one day. We're adding another room and a we're welding some monkey bars together on the playground…"

"Little Jezzy's growing up too. She's still a straight 'A' student and wants to go to college- to be an obstetrician – and I've been gathering up a little funding here and there to send her to a prep school over there…" The words 'little funding' meant Jack had spent days and days organizing a charity darts event in *The Waterline Tavern* and by now he'd probably already paid for her first year of school!

"That's neat Jack." Mama said, hushed like whenever she heard about them. "What would they ever do without you Jack?"

"Someone'd help them, I think."

"I wonder…" she said unconvinced.

Charm School

After the silly charm school she'd gone in the head to put on the new clothes that they'd foisted on her so she could walk in the door and please her mom some. She never missed an opportunity to please her, for she so seldom did.

She had led an active life biking all around the port, and her mother's cooking was tops and she found she'd suddenly outgrown her little-girl chubbiness when she tried on the clothes, it was an elegant straight dress of peach. And she loosened her pony tail down.

She came out of the stall and looked in the mirror standing there and gasped!

She had begun to have a bit more hips and curves somehow hadn't noticed! They'd given her another bra that gave her shapely feminine bosom and showed her little waist. She kept turning in front of the mirror, surely this was someone else in it! 'Gees somehow I've grown up and didn't know it!' She said to herself – she was about to become a woman! She had been so busy

with Jack in the port that she had forgotten about herself! She walked out of the church homeward with a head full of awe, trying to totter down the road in the heals "I'm such an amateur at being a woman!" she laughed to herself she steadied her way down the sidewalk with the little hand bag counterweight at her side.

"Is that you Molly!"

She turned balancing carefully on her heals to see Steele had come out of the joint and had hopped on his bike behind her.

"Hi Steele."

"Well, blow the man down! It *is* you, Molly!" he said. He was griping the handlebars hard and his eyes were wide in amazement.

"Yes." She smiled shyly though she wanted to run away immediately, for this was the foe of her Jack.

"Turn around again."

And she carefully, en pointe, as they'd shown everyone that night and he uttered a cry in amazement. "Oh!"

And she fancied that she had snickered a bit at him.

"Well, the biggest tomboy in town has grown up!"

"Yeah…" she uttered out "Mom forced me to…"

"Not all things parents do are out of line, Molly." He said, shaking a finger at her chiding her. "You look darn good like that. You should wear more clothes like that."

"Thanks."

"I was about to ask you out, girl. I didn't even recognize you."

"Oh." She was completely stumped on what to say about that.

"Well, you've got Jack…" he hinted.

"No, he's just my kinda Godfather!" She cringed in embarrassment – cuz Jack was way above her!

"No, of course not." And he got out his wallet and handed her his business card to his club. "I'd like to take you out sometime, Molly. Just friends."

"Lola?" she managed to utter about his then some girl friend.

"We've had too many problems Molly…"

"I'm sorry."

"I am too. Where is Jack, anyway?"

It always seemed to boil back down to Jack, she thought, wondering what he could possibly want from him. She felt a stab of fear for some unknown reason. "I—um, he's in town".

"Thought so." He changed tack. "Well listen girl, I'd like to take you out to eat sometime, no strings attached. Call me sometime, okay?"

"Okay." Gees, I'm so easily led. I don't even know what to say. I'm too chicken to go out with this guy. But then she stole

a shy look over at him, he was not unhandsome afterall and their eyes met over this surmise and he had smiled at her – rather a Jacklike smile and fired up his bike and waved her bye with three fingers on the handle bars and off he roared down the road.

Her mother bounded off the couch the instant Molly came in the door. "Ah! Now I like that! You look tremendously better, Molly!”

She spun Mo around to show Tim and Mo did a curtsy for him.

“But I’m not gonna be a cheerleader!” and her parents instantly laughed heartily out loud. But she thought: 'Did she not remember that I was a girly little girl once, before my real Daddy had died?

"Yeah, it's not too bad. It's not too frilly."

"It doesn't have to be pink to be feminine, Molly."

“Oh, good.” She walked into the kitchen, Tim was now talking to someone in there – it was Jack sitting in there hunched over their calculator and to her shock and he jumped up from the table and removed his ship’s ballcap. He’d never done the likes of that before!

“Wow... Molly.” He said.

Molly blushed deeply and looked down with a downturned smile – a sheer act of pseudo-modesty that they had taught the girls in that school that day, and that Molly had also stolen straight from Bonnie. She laughed at herself like Jack would - she might as well learn to enjoy this new behavior as well.

“You look darn good!” Jack declared.

She curtseyed and her parents again exploded in laughter, but Jack just sat back down there looking at her quiet and sober.

“Stop laughing at me!” she cried turning around to them.

“We're not laughing at you Mo” Flo said still hanging onto Tim for support and even Tim was red in his face from laughter.

“It's just it’s such an act!” she said “I betcha you're back in your jeans and ball cap tomorrow morn!”

“Maybe so.” said Molly, now miffed and starting to turn to go upstairs to take it all off.

“Now wait a minute, baby.” Said Flo now tenderly, catching her arm carefully. “You look real nice, Doll.” she came right up to her daughter and put her arm on hers. “Look, it's just so different that's all.” she said. “Looky here, let's all get some ice cream in us and celebrate just a tiny bit.”

“Awright, Ma.”

They all sat down.

“I got asked out walking back home.” Molly said confided secretly pleased, rather hoping to impress her Jack with her new, grownup Molly.

“Who?” Tim asked.

“Garratt Steele.” Molly said pulling out his card to show Jack. The two cousins exchanged a glance and she wondered what that meant.

“He’s a bit old for you Molly.” Tim said. “I think he’s about my age, almost.”

“Elderly, in other words.” Jack teased.

“I thought he was with Lola Cotoma.” Flo said getting the bowls out.

“He said they were having too many problems.”

“That’s justa male line Molly – *sheee-yit!!* – about as old as the sea!”

“Sure’nuff!” Flo agreed.

“Look, I don’t want you going out with him.” Tim said, putting his fists down. “He’s not right for you.”

“Yessir.”

He breathed out a sigh of relief at her quick agreement and his eyes locked with Jack’s.

"Well now see Molly, you wear nice clothes and you get asked out right off the bat. Why not wear more clothes like this?" Mom asked getting the ice cream out of the freezer.

"Well, I don't have any more, I guess." she said looking down, adding to her little act a slight girlish fidget from side to side coyly, as she said this.

The men laughed at her fidget but Mama said: "Well! That's easy to fix!" and she dug in her apron pocket and handed Molly almost a week’s pay. "I’ll call Bonnie up and have her help you buy some more clothes like these – that you can wear everyday."

"Yes, Mama." she said taking the bills modestly.

“Molly?” Mama asked quietly. “I know you can't wear a dress everyday, but, would you at least please stop wearing that ball cap and fix your hair? Just put it in a ponytail, or wear it down, now Molly. Would you *please* just do that?” she pleaded. “ and ditch the shirttails, Mol, please.”

“Yes ma'am.” Molly answered, amazed at the pleasing tone of her mother's request and willing to continue her favor. “Sure.”

“Well, that was easy.” Flo said looking to Tim, amazed at her daughter's compliance.

“Yes, Flo, she’s growing up.” Tim said.

“It’s about friggin’ time.” She was harsh for a second but then swallowed deeply, eyes watering “Tim. Look, I have a beautiful daughter.”

Molly blushed deeply and then looked across the table to Jack and suddenly regretted agreeing to this new look, for Jack

didn't seem to say too much, he just staired at her and looked afraid - which made her become confused and worried about this and wondered if it was the end of all her childish capers in town with Jack, for dressed in ballcap he seemed to treat her like a boy or a buddy, now he sat there quiet and she was worried.

"*Un-cle* Jack." she said "You promise to still treat me the same too, won't you?"

"The same?" he gasped, lost.

"Yeah, like in the port and all, like we always do…fishing, for example." They were supposed to go fishing the next day even.

He looked up and then rather frightened he looked over to her parents. "Well, now, see, you're a young lady now..." he was looking at her dress that didn't go to well with fishing.

"Ah! See, that's why I didn't do this before!" Molly cried out to her Mama, her pain - it was a real threat to her mother's new victory and for once Flo understood her daughter's dilemma exactly.

"Jack, don't spoil it." Flo warned "We finally got her out of that hat!"

"Just remember Moll is family, Jack." Tim said mug in hand. "She not just some girl…"

"Yes, he grinned sheepishly. "Okay." and he seemed pleased, too. "Yeah, kiddo, you'll always be my buddy." He tickled Molly.

And they sat there, with the ice cream bowels toasting Molly. Thus she went from the ball-capped tomboy to debutante princess all in one night. And this night, it was a night of magic, and capricious in nature like the wind, for it was the last night he was her 'Uncle Jack', for nature had blown her towards adulthood, and she was his little girl no more.

Later going up the stairs she him say to her parents, "Can't believe how much she look's like her old man like that." and if Molly had known what that had meant to him she would have guessed at another meaning of his silence, for she had brought back a ghost from the grave that night.

She looked at herself in the mirror upstairs – looking for the father in her face there. *The father that was...was therein… Who was he? Where is he? Had he ever been?*

The Veering Winds

The Santa Annas began to blow deep that night hard; the weathercock pointed his beak seawards and the desert blew her superheated breaths, rubbing along the scrubby passes, ignites their dry kindling of dill and sage and the skies were filled with char and the incense of a great Californian fire – the great fire monsoon that swept every late summer. And Molly awoke with dry mouth and parched lips and went down below.

She heard voices in the garage below and was surprised that she could hear her stepfathers snoring so she peaked below. Jack was sitting on a barstool – crunched over his own expensive pool table cover with a beer in his fist with her mother, both drunkedly talking.

"I never stopped thinking about him." And he was shaking head in hands.

"But Jack you said he died smiling."

And Molly took a deep breath in – they were in the forbidden corridor now – talking about her late father!

He was weeping "Yeah, he was even making a kind of joke."

"You never told me this part before, why?"

"Because I was so ashamed that he needed me so."

What? What was this? Molly froze. What had happened to her father?

"Jack if he could forgive you, why can't you forgive yourself."

"Because…" and he was now weeping, his great shoulders heaving.

"Because of what?"

"Because he died drunk and well, where does that leave him?"

"Oh Jack, I understand, because you're Catholic you think you doomed him."

"Forever."

"Somehow, I don't think so. You said he died smiling – he was at peace with God, Jack."

He shook his head. 'I don't think so, Flo.' He still couldn't even talk about him even after all these decades. "Oh, God! I'm going down, Jack!" he heard over and over.

Flo now shook his shoulders "Jack, wake up from this! You're free now!"

"No, I'll never be."

"Why Jack! Wake from this!"

"I'm cursed."

“I’m not Jack. I’ve gone on in my life from Tommy. Why can’t you?”

“I’m cursed.

“No, that’s just in your head Jack.”

“I always have such trouble concentrating.”

“We all do at times, Jack.”

“I could never hold down any job after her” he replied somewhat cryptically to that, “I’m nothing without the Navy.” And he staggered over to his couch, through himself face forward down and passed out leaving Flo standing over him her arms out as if holding so many unanswered questions, like untied mooring lines.

And Moll went rummaging around in the attic with multiple questions she pondered of herself, of why Jack was always hers and why he was tied to them, more than just family. But no one would tell her the story, she’d only guessed at it for years and years now.

She had thought of herself as special – and she was; she was, you see, the only girl whom Jack would never leave.

But was he hers, or did he belong to a ghost of the ever lost unbegotten Tommy? Or of another?

And she’d found the pictures of Jack and Tim in Olongapo and on her nightstand she’d propped up the picture and wondered and wondered into a trance, there was something in the picture that made her stair.

Jack and the Semiphor

"Why, I'd be on top of the world." Penny'd thought of Jack and his bouts of brooding. She now could see he was a party-goer par excellence.

But what was troubling her now was the kid still at Jack's side. She saw that he'd gotten his rewards of a kind of celebrity high stakes almost unheard of in that big city. So, why did he want to do more? Now he should be out to please her, she thought. And what did he want with this kid, who just happened to be a girl?

She did not understand Jack just then, though she had tried, and she had become a poor replacement for the trio of Bonnie, Jack and Molly, for she couldn't stand the kid, who had been dressing almost as a boy, and now was not.

She'd have to bite her tongue in disappointment to see the kid tag along with them on outings. And Jack would never get cosey with her, with the kid there. And then lately she had gone under some transformation by this charm school thing and she was getting rather pretty in a natural, unaffected way; and Penny was everything a bottle of bleach or a sunbed could bake.

"She's my kind of God-daughter." Jack'd explained from the start. But that hadn't made too much sense either, for he hadn't told almost anyone that Mol was the daughter of the best buddy - who had died in his arms.

But alas, that was Jack and his secrets and the kid tagged along just everywhere!

She had never met someone who had volunteered so extensively for others. It was so uncommon of an experience that it shook her to her soul. All she was surrounded with was capitalistic culture – her father's world, and amongst none of them was a prince, nowhere was a man like Jack.

What was it that so intrigued her, she felt it must be some kind of honorbound duty, for he would not talk of it nor, nor would he vaunt it in himself, for he would only grumble something that he was court-ordered to help them. Yet did she know what a fib that was, for no such order existed upon this earth.

He had a big warm heart And yet – he was sharp as a knife, for no one ever pulled things over on Jack, no not even she, Penny the prom queen. He fought sometimes too and yet paradoxically there were his orphans he had served with a tenacity that had lasted well over ten years. All these details she had learned from others about town, not directly from him, and she had been blown away by it.

It was about some kind of force within him, of something she was too inexperienced in the world to understand – but she would see how all his peers wore their ribbons over heart, that were real signs of the inner outwards, in which she knew little of that world. It was more than service to country, and crackerjack seamanship, it was… What was it? It was this honor and more - unseducable courage and whatever that meant was attractive as hell, though the cheerleader could not utter a reason why.

Jack mostly took Penny around Point Loma on their dates, where he'd come across his many, many acquaintences and friends in the clubs around the Navy Training Center, known as NTC. Though he was ostensibly courteous with her, bought any drink she'd lift to her lips and throughout the night smacked them, she felt jealous, or, well secondary to this world of his.

She had shots taken from a professional photographer and was now only lacking an agent and her preoccupation with Jack was the only thing that had stopped her, thus far.

They sailed around Point Loma like they were like a celebrity pair. She never had to tell him a thing about the yacht she'd been raised with, he was so superconfidnet and trimmed the sails sharply always as they rounded the bend, and then they started taking the yacht for short little cruises around the bay, after workdays or on some Saturdays when her father wasn't in town. And he would swing by one of his old ships – he liked doing this even better than going out on the open sea, and he flashed the bridges flashes of light – semaphore greetings that she did not understand, and he was always laughing real hard, when he got them to answer back.

"What did they say, Jack?"

"I told them: 'Morosky, stop Skating on the bridge, QM1 McCracken passing on by."

"How did you know it was Morosky?"

"I asked him."

"Just now?"

"Yeah."

"What did they say, back?"

"We have the Phalanx RADAR locked on you, Jack." He laughed until he was hoarse.

"What?"

And he waved her look off, "Never mind. It's just a joke."

"Oh."

And one day they brought Denny with them – it was actually her idea, for he seemed to be actually on her side.

And she brought out the beers as they were all a sail in the bay.

"Oh, no thanks, I'm cutting back."

"YOU! You're cutting back!" Jack exclaimed, shocked and slightly irritated or vexed or something, he didn't know what or even why.

"Yeah, Jack, I haven't been myself recently."

"Well, well." He said to himself, while Denny and Penny joked on the bow of the ship. He had the helm as usual and there was a nice stiff breeze and he swung the *Mermaiden's Lock* gently into the cross breaze, where her sails slapped taughtly and then took the full puffs of the winds to cut back around the corner of North Island, where the big girls, *The Connie* and *the Kitty Hawk* were moored.

They filled his eyes and he wanted a beer to drink them in with. "Penny!" he cried and gestured for a drink.

She went below to get it and Denny came up to him on the stern. "How come you don't treat her better, Jack?"

"I treat her all right." He said in a reverie.

"You just snapped at her again."

"No I didn't." now he was ticked.

"Yes, you did Jack."

"I had to call out loud so she could hear."

"Hmmmmmmm." Denny said doubtfully.

"Well, next time I'll just go below and get it myself." He snapped. "And you can grab the helm, Denny." It was a terrible insult for Denny had lost his merchant mariner's license in a drunken crash and Jack instantly regretted his mean words, for the guy couldn't even steer this yacht, when he'd been a third mate on a tanker.

"Jack, I'm only saying this for your own good, I don't want these days to pass you by, one day you may be old like me and wonder why you didn't go for that beautiful blonde girl with the beautiful yacht."

"Yeah, well I don't like being tied down."

"Just trying to help you Jack."

"I don't want to get married and she knows that. It was her idea to go out today, and so I'm doing just that – for her."

"Jack, don't get defensive, I'm just trying to help you not to make a mistake with your life."

"I'd make a poor husband."

"She loves you Jack; just look at her." Denny was saying and Penny was coming back up the ladder with two beers with limes and salt on the rims and she was radiant with joy, Jack noticed and he drunk in the words of his friend.

**NORTH ISLAND PARTY-REDO SOME

On the sixteenth of July – the Friday a day before his birthday, Tim drove Jack, Flo, Molly and Rick over to North Island, for Jack's birthday party – at Jack's favorite place – the Enlisted Club, where he knew scores of sailors and where beer could be bought for a quarter at six, or 1800 for lifers.

"Where's Penny?" Flo asked as they walked on in.

"Ah, I'm seeing her tomorrow for a dinner date." He said while a squadron of Tomcats thundered over them as they walked over.

Tim said "Here Molly." And handed her the keys to the car. She quickly tucked them in her new purse before Mama would balk. "You're driving us all home."

"What?" Flo asked stunned. "She barely knows how to drive!" she tailed after him still nagging, but he strode away from her confidently, command given.

"She'll do fine." He finally snapped back. He had personally given her several lessons recently. "Stop babying her, Flo, she knows how to drive."

"But…"

"I said, Flo, she will do fine." He commanded. "She never drinks anyway." he said turning to Jack. "Now let's have a good time."

And Jack laughed in delight. "Your baby's grown up, Flo!"

"I'm not so sure…"

"Pipe down, Flo!" Tim turned and snapped. And Finally Flo fell back.

The night was Tim's Birthday gift to Jack – a night of glorious drinking – to no end – all that Jack had requested – with no lectures about his career. He'd personally asked Tim only for this, and to watch out after him that night – not let him get into any fights.

"That's right." Said Jack smiling broadly at his cousin's idea.

"Jack McCracken... .bane of the seventh fleet!" They heard from behind them.

"That you 'DJ'?"

"Yep. It's me Jack." DJ swayed up to them and they all shook hands, as they came in the entrance, sailor style, all asway, cologne intoxicating. "After all these years I finally catch up to your hide!" It was nice to see a black sailor could fit in so well with the fleet so full of whites and Pacific Islanders. DJ was another first class and had an arching patch on his shoulder from the *USS Kitty Hawk*.

Another Chief came up to the group for an intro "Hey DJ, this is Chief 'Ikky' Landers my rackmate from Boot, and this is 'Famous Rick', my rackmate from the *Connie*."

"Well, you brought all your bedmates with you, Jack." He teased.

"Ha!" he laughed delighted. "And this is my cousin Tim and his family. He's also chief in the Nav too."

"Whatcha all doing here?" DJ asked

"Just skating.'

"Oh, of course!"

"Birthday evolutions." Said Tim.

"What do you know, they issued you another birthday, Jack?"

"Yeah, whatdya know!" he said swaying at the entrance to the club as if drunk already.

Now seeing Molly there too and DJ blinked in surprise.

"Well, come on DJ, Join us on my birthday."

"Sure."

Her mother and stepfather had found a table nearby to the pool tables leaving Molly free to skylark about herself and hover by the tables watching it all as if alone.

Molly felt completely surrounded by a forest of tall guys, so confident and proficiently social in their own world and she, thanks to Jack, could experienced this fabulous and forbidden masculine world. Even though they'd had her stepfather's den, she was completely surprised by it, probably because being immersed in it fully for the first time as an adult... It was a world full of codes that she just didn't know...

And she was almost drunk in the rich maleness of it.. the difference of it... the utter comradery of it... The iconic Navy movie "Top Gun" had just come out and they were playing the high flying very masculine soundtrack from it. At six, they had a quarter-a-beer-gush. He, being the designated announcer on the *Constellation* – had met many a guy at happy hours all around the Pacific rim and the IO - packed with sailors. Many rounds were bought how the booze flowed! They shot pool The drink flushed their faces in glorious drunken memories and seastories. And Molly longed to be a part of this, though on the outskirts of the action she clung, back with her family at the table.

"Jack, who's that?" she could hear DJ finally asked as he wracked up the balls on the table.

Jack scratched his head uncomfortably. "Well, DJ, that's Tommy's little girl, Molly. I've kept up with her all these years."

DJ stood there stunned looking at her.

"Oh, Wow! She's so much bigger now!"

"Molly, come here. This is DJ - he knew your father quite well."

“Hi!” she said breathless getting up fast to talk to them.

“Yeah, and you look just like him.”

“I do??”

“Yeah, it was a little like seeing a ghost there for a second.”

“Really?”

“Don’t you know? You got pictures of him, right?”

“Only ten.”

“Ten Pictures? That’s all?”

“Yeah, my Daddy was kind of an orphan. He didn’t have any close family.”

“Yeah, kiddo, I remember that now.”

Jack split at these words leaving her to gawk and gaze.

“He was really neat. I miss him, Tommy Malloy. Oh, and I remember seeing pictures you as a five year old – in a yellow dress.”

“What was he like?”

“Oh, he was neat, he hung out just like a bruther, you know when the *Connie and the Kitty Hawk* had some racial tensions, but he always treated me first class, he did. I liked him very well.”

“I don’t really remember him too well.”

“Oh, too bad girl, too bad.”

“All’s I remember was that he liked to drink.”

“Yeah, kiddo.” He said sighing and not ‘pulling any punches.’ As they say. But seeing the shock on her face he added:

“You know girl, I think I have some pictures of him somewhere. I’ll take a look for them. Think I have them stashed in a cruise book at my mother’s house in Chula Vista. If I find them I’ll bring them over to Jack’s ship and have him give them to you.”

“Oh! Please!” she said practically begging and terrible hungry for any shread of information about her father.

She was about to ask more questions but he said: “Well, I'm going now to shoot some pool, Miss Mo. See you around kiddo." He said, giving her a wink and left her there with ghosts of the past unclaimed. The past atmosphere gave the 'E' Club intoxicating atmosphere for her, and for perhaps Jack for the ghosts that haunted Molly still haunted the fleet.

Flo brought out a cake she’d made and concealed in the trunk and their presents and put thirty two candles on it, lighting them with a lighter. The whole club joined in and sang a rollicking happy birthday and Jack flushed in happiness at this comradery and blew out the candles. He opened their presents. Tim and Flo had bought him a new fishing rod, Molly a new longsleave shirt. Rick had bought him some cologne and

Landers had bought him a bottle of Mexican Tequila from way south of the border. Delighted and they ate the cake and ice cream at the table.

It seemed everyone knew Jack or Rick one way or another.

"To the boat."

"To the boat." They all repeated glasses high. Her mother was one of them, joining them as if one of the boys – why was this alright when she did it?

"Used to drink these at the NCO club at Clark."

"Yes, me too." Rick recalled.

Jack held up his German beer - a Grolsch to the neon light and told Flo "Do you know that my mother used to have a case of thirty of these delivered to us every week." he popped the hinged top.

"Really Jack?" she said.

"…local German guy brought em to our door even and we used to run a big tab on them, but the biggest darn thing to Max, though, was he got the friggin used bottles back! Darn."

"Gosh…"

"Yeah, Mom and I could hold our beer after that." He lifted up the little bottle, appreciating it in the dim light. Molly wondered how old he was back then to be drinking so much, and to be partying with his own mother!! They didn't have a drinking age limit overseas, but wouldn't his own mother stopped it?..but there must have been more to the story than that…

But it kept on coming - the rounds, the pool games, the old buddies, the old days, the old ways.. all set to fond remembrances by the cheap happy hour drinks.

Molly sat there on the barstool, mesmerized by the green tables, which looked like little football fields around which a guy could smartly shoot a pocket, or strut around cue in one hand, cig in mouth, teasing each other, while swaying as if to sea. Ah! Little territories they were, these green little yards, a contest field for play fights, she could see like a pack of wolfs at play, but always a play to gently wrest dominance out of each other and Jack was ever winning that sort of game! What a sight he was too! He was the best there, the best talker, player, drinker, leader… how that intrigued her young little heart, for she was in good need of a winner, for some reason. He was a winner here in this court, a court of his shipmates and the game was actually, though fun, was for real in a contest of charm and game that was of mansworld - that is shipboard, most especially. The lessons learned on these fields were played in the passageways of ships, on deck, on the job and 'tween ranks.

How he could shoot! He'd never stop talking for long, even when he was shooting the words flowed out of his mouth, between luxuriant exhalations, telling tales of mates they most all knew

or met somewhere across the Pacific. And shooting as if the power of the shot, of taking aim, elegantly setting up the shot. Molly spied on him secretively admiring the Jack at work on the field. The drinks had unleashed this tiger, this royal flush of a cat.

For at 'home' in the den, he was by far, more relaxed. In fact, she realized he often came with ideas and questions to talk to Tim about, caring much less about his game, so much that she thought Jack's game was not up. She realized by watching the contrast of behaves, that Jack really looked up to Tim a lot, to not care about all this strutting around; and that was neat for she needed to see that too. As she saw the big difference in his actions she realized suddenly and sweetly that there seemed to be few people that Jack was bested by and her stepdaddy was one of them.

Here, though, the tiger in Jack sprang out of the jungles..the tiger whom she just knew who lived, who just purred when he was at home in the den, sprang showing fancy regal stripes and predatory prance of his presence. He placed stacks of bets of greenbacks on each table, and every game was subject to not just winning but a spirited argument over every term. "You said you gotta win by two." "Naw, you didn't call that.." "Hey, I'm high balls, you're low... Heck no!" He'd slyly change from stripes to solids amidgames, just to create argument, and relished the fun of the clash of words that followed. Argument was a part of the fun of the game, part of the contest, part of the mansworld of challenge, and boy, could he ever win at it!

At times, sitting there, she became overwhelmed by his presence and began to wonder what was she doing with such a celeb, such a high flying person when she was so ungainly and awkward and deeply in her heart like Bonnie, whom he did not seem to value… And could she ever hope to be so confident?

Yet, she could learn, she supposed, so her time was not lost. For a girls weaponed each other with the curves of her hips and the fullness of her hair, and by gossip and aligning of clicks. But there is no question of how a lady would compete with and for such a guy for there was no equaled playing field, for so different were they. It strengthened her interest in the Navy, for in it she saw herself growing.

For, she'd been such an outcast for so long, to be able to be around with Jack and he was so upcast, a real shark on the social scene and a real raconteur. She'd been a looser far too long... a weirdo to hide in a ballcap..here was a one far above her, with ways far more worldly than hers, with social skills of artful and intoxicating array.

And yet, he had great big heart, for, as the *Navy Times* had said and which she had believed, there was that big

orphanage, made out of heartbreak, to a comrade fallen.. he could be both, *both shark and high flying kite, and yet so humbled, so contrite*..she didn't think he'd ever forget that crucible which had forged him deep heart, and yet at times he walked in the stratosphere of story like dreams..and how could a girl, even a beaute like Bonnie, in that land dwell?

It was not unlike him to buy a bum a drink- the dredges, the infidels of soceity, who stalked themselves, who caricatures of normal ones were seeking to hide in a torrent of drinks and drugs and he buying them a drink or two for their consolation and around him they flocked in aphelion around the stellar, solar Jack.

But yet here she was again almost lost in the lust of the intoxication of him, he was so deliriously wonderful and at the same time so downfallen and she had herself, caught him so many times to lift him back up to the one he could be, so unbelievably upcast, with the contrasting great humbleness that makes a man wonderful, not arrogant, like a movie star or something.

Yes, he was great inside..he was a stunning leader… and she admired him so, so that she was forced to believe in words who ministered their mercies on her forecasting what he was meant to become, if he could escape a place like this, if he could only believe..if, if, if he would..what, but she, Molly ever on the Jackwatch, could.

The night drew on and they sat around the big table together drinking deeply… Drink after drink… Story after story…

And finally they were closing the bar down all together, the bell rang for last call and all were deeply drunk, except Molly of course. But she was not quite sober either, for she was lost in it all. The two cousins started to leave holding each other up and Flo was holding onto her daughter giggling. They'd lost Rick somewhere to a girl that night. And Molly lead this curious bunch to the car, where they managed to pile themselves in. She could hear her parents in the back, teenage like smooching - her mother giggled 'I LOVE YOU TIMMY!' She'd said twenty times; and Jack lay still, dead drunk in the passenger seat head pressed up against the windshield. She had to roll her window down, such reeked the fumes. And she awkwardly started the chevy and drove slowly towards the gate, saluting the *Connie* berthed to her left.

Her adventures made good copy to Bonnie, early the next day who laughed right out about her adventures of that day, while sweeping up gobbly black hair shorn off the heads of early-bird customers that morn.

"Well, it's about time you learned to drive." she said. She was even red with laughter, rare for the stoic Bonnie.

"It was kind of cool to learn on my own that way. I mean I was pretty nervous at first, but there was no one there to nag me."

"Yeah! They were passed out!" She could barely laugh and sweep such was her mirth.

“I was a bit scared of the bridge, but I did it alright. Well, you never know what's gonna happen with Jack!" Molly declared.

"That's why you’re always with him." She joked. But there was a rich vein of truth in it.

Molly dug for more. "What'dya mean?"

"He seems to know you're always gonna be there for him. He used to tell me things like that."

“Really?”

“He always called you his little guardian angel.”

"Oh." she said stunned, though she’d felt like an outsider a little bit on that trip across the bay, but now Bonnie presented her the meritorious ribbon of the obvious..it wasn't always an accident that she always happened to be there when Jack needed her. She was gaining her "sealegs" in this adult world because Jack so regularly and easily made her a vital part of it.

The Triangle Club

She had brought him, again, as she had many a time before, the tray of coffee, water and aspirin. But even at noon he was so sick this time he waved her off until deep into the afternoon. Her parents were also still in bed, but at least they were watching the game because she could hear them in there talking base hits and RBIs. And she disapeered into a Stevenson until four, when she came back down he was finally coming out of the shower in a t-shirt and jeans and seeing her, he threw himself forward on the couch like someone sliding into first base.

"Oh, Molly." He moaned. "What did I do to myself again?"

"Want the tray now? Or something to eat?"

"Yeah, and get me some toast, will ya girl?"

She came back down with it and the usual coffee and he was huddled under the blankets, though it was not cold. "Thanks girl." He managed to get out and munched on the toast getting crumbs on the blankets, that she flung off for him.

She just gazed down at him. He did not look well, even for being hungover as he was. "Aren't you tired too?" he asked her.

"No." she laughed a little.

"You're not hung over too"

"No, since when have I drank, Jack?"

"You don't drink, Molly?"

"Jack! What's up with you? You know I don't drink!"

"Ugh. I'm sorry, Mol, I'm so hungover I don't know what I'm saying."

"That's for sure!"

"But, thought I saw you last night." He said bewildered and disoriented. Where was his head!

"It was Gingerale."

"You could of last night, y'know. The drinking age is 18 on base." She was astounded; he'd never pushed her to drink before. Wow, was he just hung over?

"And miss out on all the fun?" she asked.

"Fun?"

"Yeah, watching everyone getting drunk – especially Mom." She laughed.

He sipped the coffee, gazing with aching eyes at her coming to his sober senses at last. "You know, Mol, I admire you for never drinking. I wish I could be like you." He leaned back on the couch groaning, hurting. "I really must hate myself."

What could she say, she didn't fully understand why she'd never drank and why he did.

"I had to cancel my date with Penny. There's no way I'm going out to eat tonight."

"What about going to the Triangle Club?"

"I'm too hungover to go there."

"I'll walk with you." She offered. Walking did no end of good to their Jack, especially with young company like hers. They'd been doing this for years, it was something they shared. He loved walking all about town and chatting. It was something that he only did with her.

He rubbed his forehead considering. "Get me one of your Daddy's cigs and then maybe I can get moving."

She brought a pack back instead, with an ashtray, caring less if Tim'd get mad or not.

"You know me." He said noticing the pack. He sat up tapped the pack and lit one looking out the windows moodily. "One poisen for another." He said inhaling deeply. "I'm getting tired of it all." He exhaled, brooding on the couch, listless, dreamless and disenchanted with the sober reality set before him.

She sighed and he noticed saying "Guess you've heard that before."

"Yep."

"Don't you ever get tired of me?"

"No, Jack, just worried."

"You're too young to be worrying about the likes of me."

"I've known you too long to hear that."

"Whatever."

He put his boondockers on and stood up and called up the stairwell, where her mother was up there in the kitchen, finally. "Hey Flo, Molly and I are going for a walk for an hour or two, okay?"

"To the AA meeting?" she called back down.

"Yeah. How did you know?"

Flo only snickered her reply back as pans clanked and rattled on the stove top.

"Well, I guess you all know me." He said turning around to face Molly.

"Yes, Jack."

They walked the streets together – as they had so many times before in the last decade, in many various states of Jack: drunken, hungover, sober, fearful, high-flying… Or, he let her talk out of her little high school world. They were like best friends then, and Jack was all hers no matter how hungover he was. Seldom did he not feel better after a walk or a trolley

ride in the big city; her medicine she ministered to him, him of the big, but broken heart.

And she wanted to ask him, her best friend of her father, but he was always so unfit and so very undone that she wondered if she'd ever know what really happened *out there* in the deep ravenous moors of the Western Pacific.

The Triangle Club

"Only one out of ten make it to permanent sobriety." AA.

They entered the room with the chairs in a giant circle. It was icky-smokey in there and it brought Jack's hangover back to him in huge waves and he looked over to Molly in fear and nausea as they sat down.

During the week one could find all kinds of executives and lawyers, but on the weekend it was the longtimers who came out for the meetings. These were people who were in the battles for many years and had, through intensive introspection demanded of the steps, developed great kindnesses and homely charm and so Molly thought Jack actually enjoyed them, for they were common, humbled folk, in short they were good people, who's only aspirations were to remain sober and help others, and of course they loved Jack, for he was easy to love and be amazed by.

They must have thought Molly was either his daughter or niece or something, for she seldom said anything to show who she was or why she was there. Everyone was supposed to introduce themselves in this manner: "Hi I'm Molly – I am an alcoholic," which since she'd never even had had a drink she didn't feel right in saying that. "What do I say to them Jack?" she had asked the first time long ago as they went in as they walked into the first meeting and Rick was with them that day. Jack rankled a bit with that. "Geez, Molly I don't know, I'm not saying I'm an alcoholic, geez, I'm not some freekin' looser." So all he said he was "Just Jack" and Rick and Molly snickered to each other a little when he said that. And Molly told them only "I'm Molly." Rick however said a line lifted partly from *Casa Blanca*: "Hi. I'm Rick, and I'm a drunkard."

And they'd all answer in chorus "Hi Rick."

But everyone was so kind to them afterwards and Molly noticed they all took to Jack and he was jubiliant. When they left he would whistle to himself as he always did when hopeful.

"You know that was kind of cool afterall." He'd say sometimes. And he went more often to their sober little clubs when he was down but he still seemed to be "in the Nile" as the Annonymizers had wryly called 'denial' and somehow she knew he hadn't really stopped drinking inspite of it all and she began to wonder what, indeed, could stop him - before it was too late…

But,this time Jack was really hung over bad. After the ceremonial reading of the steps and the traditions, several members shared their experiences with the steps and other spiritual aspects like humility and she could hear Jack breathing hard next to her as he struggled with his hangover, She then saw Denny across the room and he had winked at her.

"Hi my name is Jimmy and I am an alcoholic."

"Hi Jimmmy." They all said.

"I just want to say, that there are some who still suffer" he glanced at Jack briefly "For twenty year I worshipped the god of Alcohol. She was the most important thing in my life – she was the first thing I thought about when I was going to get up and the first thing I thought about when I got off work and she was the last thing I did before I went to bed. I think I would have rather had a drink than get laid! Can you imagine that! She was some lover! I risked my jobs for her, my career! She dominated my every thought and act. Can you think of anything spent more devotion on than that! She was my god and the ruler of my life - but what a poor god who brings only misery and despair!"

"Thank you Jimmy." Said the chorus of 'anonymizers'.

Five more people shared briefly adding on to what Jimmy had been saying and their own echoes of their struggles. English voice, so familiar to Molly.

"Hi Denny." The chorus said.

"You know we're dealing not just with DWIs and job loss, but this is a fatal disease. Folks, I found out about a month ago that I have cirrhosis of the liver. Glad to be here, though, glad to be sober, for once. Thank you."

"Thank you, Denny." They chorused, again.

After the ceremonial closing and reading of the Serenity Prayer, Jack whispered in her ear. "Let's get the hell out of here!" and he grabbed her hand and began to pull her out to the door.

"Jack!" said some guy, standing over him, and it was too late to flee! She could hear him sigh next to her and now most of the people in the meeting would come over and greet him now, so he turned reluctantly and they all ganged around him of course.

"It's Jack, guys. Jack's back!" an old guy said warmly while he was shaking their hands one by one

"It's about time you got your butt back!" Jimmy said, muscling his way to Jack. "And work the program again."

"Yeah, Hi Jimmy."

"Hi there Molly. Geez, you look hungover Jack." His bright blues penetrated Jack.

He nodded humbly. "Had my thirty second birthday party last night."

"Oh?"

"It's actually my birthday still." He said trying to laugh at himself.

"Not a good way to celebrate it, is it, being so hungover?"

"Nope, Jimmy."

"So why are you here, then, Jack? Are you tired of suffering enough?"

"Yeah Jimmy."

"Give yourself a birthday present of sobriety Jack, this next year of your life, Jack. You'll love yourself for it."

"Right." He was shaking his head, anxious to ward off 'the sermons' he had called them to Molly one time or two before – from the 'do-gooders and booze-haters and ex-drinkers', as if he had thought Molly'd understand his hatred of the so, so sober world all around him – that he would not give into.

Jimmy stood still, his eyes riveted on Jack almost reading these very thoughts at the back of his mind."I think you're still in love with lady alcohol."

"I don't know." Said Jack. But Molly sure did with images strung together in a vision before her right then, visions of the high-flying Jack of just the night before around the pool tables and all his many friends.

"If you're in love with her – as I once was – as an elixir for all the troubles that rest upon a man's soul; know that until you realize it she's a very unfaithful lover and dumps you high on the tide." And he turned to Molly, his eyes shining, penetrating her with the truth so spoken with authority of a lifetime of delusions with the drink. He preached to Jack with a handgrip of steel on his shoulder.

"I gotta go, Jimmy."

"Of course you do."

He was turning away, hurrying away, running away, again. "Oh and Jack…" Jimmy called out with irony and Jack spun around with the agony of it in his face.

"Happy Birthday."

Jack grabbed Molly's hand and yanked her out the door before more folk could approach and dragged her out into the fresh evening air they went. "Oh god, Mol I thought It'd never end!" and they walked down 'C' street a block or so and he leaned over a brick wall, breathing heavy, trying to stop the waves of nausea and then he wretched into a corner. Molly cringed, this was her hero - again.

"Mickies is around the corner, Jack, let's get some grub in you, and you'll feel better." They walked around a corner and found the McDonalds.

He ate a Mac as they walked back home, she held the bag French fries for him while he drank the coffee and he felt a little better.

A motorcycle passed them by and Jack didn't see it was Steele, stairing at Jack through his helmet with cold blue eyes.

They came to a Union Tribune newsstand, and he stopped before it reading the glaring headlines: "Navy to cut 100 Ships" and his fists clenched in aggravation. "Damn! Not now!"

Blocks passed by them in silence as they walked through the gaslamp district towards to the trolley station at Park and Market. Around them were thousands of party goers in the hundreds of clubs. They walked a few blocks more along Island Street; and he was really thinking.

"Do you think I have a drinking problem, Molly?" he asked suddenly, stopping to turn to her on there, by the green Tivoli Bar railing, as if he didn't know that she hadn't lived with it on and off for most of her young life; such was the craft and of 'The Nile.'

She stared at him carefully, she was so young, but she had well-known him forever, and it was always high time for truth-telling, so she nodded slightly.

He was now angry at her. "So you think so too Molly?"

"You asked me Jack!" They stood opposite each other on the sidewalk like warriors about to fight.

He kicked a trashcan and a nest of feral cats split like lightening. A car honked and he jumped and then saw it was Penny in her red tank of a TransAm and he cussed under his breath as she jumped out clanking over to the sidewalk on wooden platform heels. "Jack what are you doing here!" she spat out, pointing her talons "…with her!"

"Don't even start something like that!" He warned. "Are you following me Penny?"

"But you were supposed to go out with me tonight!"

"I told you I'm not feeling good, so don't start with me!"

"But you walked all the way downtown with another girl!" she went on recklessly,

"That's right Penny!" His eyes were wild, in pale translucent green.

"We went to an AA meeting." Molly offered, her hands were out explaining.

"An AA meeting? Whatever for!"

"Because everyone thinks I am a drunk!" He said leaning over to Molly savagely. "*Everyone*."

"Well, *I* don't think so." She snapped, so Mall-Princess sure. "So, get in Jack." She snapped.

He grabbed the door handle and turned back to Molly opening the door for her.

"Get in Molly!"

"No, I'll walk home."

"You will not, young lady. Get in!"

She didn't move. "There is no way I am leaving you downtown on your own, Molly, now get in."

"I live down here Jack! I'll go see Denny Fagan." She said turning to go.

"Mol-ly!" Jack said threatening.

"Let her walk home if she wants to be a little b…." she choked up herself before going ballistic over this… this kid.

Finally Molly slid past Jack and jumped in the back of the car to avoid a big scene and drama that Jack despised in girls, and off they sped in the glitzy ride of Penny's to Molly's house, where Penny dropped her off wordlessly and she squeeled the tires and sped off back into the town, leaving Molly gazing at the glowing red taillights wondering at Jack's chance for sobriety now.

"Oh, I was so rude to her when she was just trying to help me." He said. He was now rolling slowly into the bed in her father's yacht in Shelter Island, positioning a bottle of rum on the bulkhead's shelf for easy reach. He grabbed his head in protest of the pain of the hangover and wiped his brow at his utter meaness to the kid. He had vows that musn't be crossed, ever!

"She'll get over it." She said trying not to sound so catty or trite.

"Well, she shouldn't have to!! I should never have treated her like that. She's family - my only family."

"I think she understands you weren't feeling good, Jack." She was saying, but to herself 'What do you care what this kid thinks – I am here now; I, Penelope the Great.'

He turned his back to her – away, again, she thought, away in the way of Jack's world – facing off to Point Loma and the West and, God, she held him from behind, and, as had many before her, Oh, how she loved him so!

Low Evals Party

"What's up?" Tim asked him wearily noting Jack popping a Coors as he strode up to 'their' garage, after removing a case of beer strapped to his bike.

"Got evals today." Jack stuffed them in the frig and slung himself on his tattered old couch.

"What were they?" Tim asked, throwing darts in a relaxed manner.

"Low."

"How low?"

"3.0 over all."

"That's not too bad." Tim hit the bull's eye.

Shit.

"Chief Belt said I was unsat in some areas..." and he lifted his can of beer to toast "..except in my actual job!" he said with deep irony in his rough voice.

"Leadership, Military Bearing and etc?"

"Oh, those were all high marks, some 4.0 even, Appearance also."

"What was the problem then?"

"Drinkin' and fightin'.." he said his arms flung on either side of his legs. He was lying – lying to himself for it wasn't all that fighting though, it was those darn details that so tripped him up all his life – like forgetting quarterly training, or being so hung over that he was UA, again.

"Well, can't you just stop those?" said Tim, whose darts poked all around the eye now. And Jack noted this with some frustration turning to rage and he clinched his fists. Tim always was bullseye at whatever he did.

"I've tried, Tim." he said wiping his forehead. "Chief wants to put me in a program and get me on Anabuse."

"Gosh, Jack."

It was a drug that made you sick when you drank.

"Chief's sending me to Drunk School up at TI."

"Jack, that's just a week of AA like meetings and clases. It's not all that bad, I've heard."

"But.. that's not the worst thing.. the worst thing he said was that my career isn't looking so good ." He wiped his forehead... "About staying in...I'm up for reinlistment next month… " he said as if they didn't know that, and hadn't known it for years. They had been bracing for it for years now.

"Just square yourself Jack." Tim said.”You’ve done that before.”

“I know, it just seems something always seems to trip me up anyway.” And the ultra low of his attention span.

Jack looked over to Tim, Molly saw, and she saw in Tim what Jack was looking for. Tim, though he was quiet, non-flamboyant, Tim was prospering.

“When will my paths ever be straight?” he was saying – like yours, Tim, like yours…

“Look,” Tim said gathering himself up like a father figure – though he was only four years older, sometimes the chief in him came out like a father “in the next month you’ve got to be flawless – not one second late, perfect in uniform, squared away at work, etcetera. You’ve done this before, Jack, it’s time to be squared away, that’s all. Put everything out of your mind except for being perfect at work.”

Jack popped open another beer, punctuating the end of this, and Molly really understood him then.

The Navy had just started then its massive RIFting of its huge fleet and any sailor with a touchy career history was fodder for being released from the service. All around them sailors started loosing their careers, longtime sailors were being unshipped and the biggest most powerful fleet in the world was being dismantled..the old shipyards like Bremerton Washington became massive cemetaries filled up with these beautiful heroic gray ladies, who lay there empty with the haunting winds that moaned past their rigging.

“Just police-up yourself.” Said Tim, who had every detail in his life well managed with the attention of a chief submariner.

"Well, you know me.." Jack said, his eyes startled and aching. "Dang, I have just got to stay in!"

Or what, Jack? I thought, Or what?

Bonnie and O’Meara “Sean” were hitting off by this time quite seriously and Molly grew lonely for her too, big sister that she was. But soon enough though Bonnie had missed Molly’s tagging along too and then Molly spent lot more time with the two of them both on dates and movies. Poor O’Meara must have guessed Molly was a part of the package when it came to Bonnie and he put up with her teenager ways, always teasing her about boys and threatening to fix her up with one of the Marines all about.

The End of an Era

Reduction In Forces - RIF

And the Winds, they were turning on the Rooster's Beak of time, and upon the Rooftop he pointed out to Sea and Away and towards the end of an Era

The US Navy had once ruled the World from the sediments to the Stratosphere, and reckoned to be 'a force of good' and democracy as we patrolled the Earth and all Her waters upon the seabeds.

But times were a'changing, as the veering of the winds that blow fortune upon whom they had so chosen, and they were to their lee as they lost their way upon the seas. And why? It was all but the whiles of the WestPac Fever had caught up to them. They must be reborn to good fortune, and seek the goodly ways that had been wrought in the Battles of in the South Pacific: Forget thee not of Guadalcanal, nor Midway and the Battle of Leyte Straits and my, my, of the Bloodbourne Honor that had been spilt and bought back then Victory upon the Seas!

The fleet was sortying again and later on it was now a volcano ended it all our stay in the islands we had won back. Mount Pinatubu blew and with that went most of our bases: Clark AFB, and NAVSTA Subic Bay. They are all gone now as the great carriers and the thousands of sailors.

RIF'ting, RIF'ting, RIF'ting and gone!
Who's gonna fight our battles on?

The tell all tavern tale

Most chiefs in the Navy knew each other in a network and when Jack's ship got a flash message from comm that they were deploying to help out the __ _____ in the Persian Gulf, Chief Belt simply just rang Chief Tim McCracken's number on base.

And Tim knew that instead of calling up every bar in town, he learned it was easier to just send Molly after him, during the day, that is. "Molly – go find Jack in town. I think he's at a club somewhere." She was dressed up for church in a white dress, so she put on capris on under it it and instead of her bike she took the trolley in town to National City, where Lola's club sat.

This particular time she did not relish her mission for she knew where he was visiting the bar of an ex-girlfriend. It gave her some perspective - why was he doing that when he was so 'happy' with Penny? But this girl was no better... she reentered Lola's Land , the Tell All Tavern,

To the back she went, where lights hung low over billiard tables casting a green aglow in pools of spotlights on the balls, and a fogbank of smoke masquerading the players; threw long old-time shadows upon the den, ghostlike caricatures from Gatsby novels and she found him in back corner round table, deep in a hand of most unfortunate clutch. After the glory of the 'E' club, what was he doing with these sorts?

In dank corner she lurked, awaiting the turn of the hand, watching the old players round about the table - Old Tom from the Santa Anita track - "retired", a professional gambler by trade and excellent cardcounter; "Swanky Joe Luck" a black man from the east LA maze, in his eighties, stogie in corner of mouth, white Fedora hat, cutting the deck, Druge gathered up the chips. "Boombah" old Tom's WWII Jap bride sat in the shadows with LaSalle, a barhag of the tavern brand, sat smoking and watching their men. The women watched in dark audience to the play at the table. This place far from the glory of the base club, was a descension halfway to the gutter and yet so interesting indeed!

He was in the thick of the streak up by three hundred when he felt a beautiful young lady had appeared into the back tavern and was watching the game from the shadows all around. She was very pretty and innocent, and like an omen she had appeared out of the shadows like dolphins would in off the bow of a frigate or a an albatross or other sea birds in the middle of the vast Pacific. Somehow she was very familiar though his entire focus was on the cardgame, but between deals he snuck a peak. An

ethereal presence of innocence, she smiled at him – like lady luck had and he lost all count of his cards and somehow had placed some kind of large bet, out of more distraction than superstition, or possibly to impress her. “Who in the world is that, Jack?” he asked himself. “Who is that?”

And then he won five hundred dollars in that hand!

Laughing he went to scoop up the pot and thank the lady luck, when he realized it was Molly!! She was so out of place in the club that he hadn’t recognized her with her hair being down long and it was lightened, and wearing such a girlish little dress.

He jumped up and strode over to her, “What in the hell are you doing here!” he asked, taken aback despite his win. “This is no place for a young lady!”

"Coming' to fetch you."

"What?” distracted, "Why?"

"You've been summoned by the chief." she tried to joke it off.

"Oh, Mol I'm doing fine!" He said eyebrows high, eyes sharpened up to Molly. She just knew he would be angry at her trespass... but then he turned away, to think, he glanced over to the neon lit jukebox, which was playing a Joplin rag, and exhaling cigarette smoke, he realized he should quit now anyway. Something was amiss at home anyway, obviously, so he said "What's wrong, Mol?"

She crooked her little finger to come over to her and she whispered in his ear “Your ship’s leaving in five hours for the Persian Gulf.”

“Wow!”

“Tim sent me.”

“I better get a move on it!” he said punching his own palm in frustration. "Well, it's a good thing I've won tonight then. Just in time, Mol.” He looked down at her – she had her shiny new purse slung on her little shoulder. “Mol, help me scoop up the pot into your purse. We’ve got to fly out of here!” and he leaned forward and whispered into her ear: ”They’re going to be ticked!!”

“Okay.” She was always game to help him, thank God.

“Guys I’m being deployed right now and I’ve gotta go!” He said and together they both started to scoop up the pot into her purse.

“You can’t just do that Jack!”

“His ship is really leaving right now.” Molly looked up to assure them.”The Persians just….”

“Oh, no way!”

“Yes!”

“You can’t just take all our money and run!”

Jack grabbed a stack of bills, papers, keys and other small items and shoved them into Molly's bag that had swung by her hip. He left most of the chips and grabbed a pile of bills in the center and He tilted his Navy ballcap at them, which had his ship's name on it stitched in gold, grabbing Molly's hand he pulled her and strode out the bar. And the players were hollering and jumping up to follow and he yanked her hand and began to run as the called after him. "Jack!"

Tipping of the hat brim to the ladymonster, Lola, at the bar, whose mouth gulped like a goldfish in tank, and alas, they ran free into the breezy nighttime air. He jumped on the bike without his helmet and she got on – she'd had the foresight to wear capris under her new dress, somehow she had known that she'd need to – and she was grabbing onto him and he was kicking it alive and then they were flying down the road.

He stopped a few blocks away to put on his helmet and get the spare for her. They could see the lights of the *Constellation* of lights cross the bay. This time, he turned to her at corner and lifted his visor.

He patted her her leg in his own way a 'thank you Mol.'

When he got home to their den, he grabbed a towel from the head and spread it on his pool table. He gestered Molly to give him her purse and he had it upside down on the table as Tim came down the stairs.

"Jack, what are you two doing??"

Jack didn't take his eyes off the pot on the table. "I've won big tonight, Tim."

They both sorted through the items, which included Molly's makeup, journal, pens and a tampon and she turned exceedingly red.

But they were not aware, for on the pile was a title and a key to a vehicle – a '69 Porsche!

"You're not going to believe what I have here."

"It's a title to a vehicle, Jack!"

"I got so distracted by Molly that I forgot about what was in the pot!" Jack exclaimed.

"Distracted by Molly?" Tim asked. "Why is that?

"Yeah, I didn't know who she was in the shadows!"

"Gees, Jack you've won over a thousand dollars as well."

Jack turned to Molly "Thanks to Lady luck! I never would have placed that bet if she hadn't appeared there like that! Like some ghost!"

"I sent her." Tim said.

"Well then, I owe you one, too." Jack said while counting the stack of money again.

"You can let me drive your new Porsche to work sometime."

"Shoot, you can drive it tonight – and for the next few months!" Jack said holding up the key. "…While I'm out to sea."

"What do you mean?"

"You've got to go to Plaza and Eighth – around number 717, where Joe keeps it and grab it before he hides it from me." He turned to pleading. "Please Tim, would you and Mol go do that right now, for me? She can drive right?"

"Yes, Jack."

"Okay!" he glanced at the big pile. "You know, this really sets me right, you know." He said admiring the pile,"with Steele. Would you please pay him off for me with this pile as well?" he handed it to Tim.

"Okay, Jack.

"He's always at The Trophy Lounge in National City these days. It's just down the street from Joe's."

"I know."

"Geez, I might even be able to send Jezzy some more!"

"Jack, Just let me in the Porsche any time I want. Don't loose it in other words because I'll have to insure it to go on base."

"No more betting with it, in other words. Okay, you have a deal, Tim. Oh, and I'll fax you a power of attorney to register it for me. Oh, put a steering wheel lock on it at home, Joe could have a spare key somewhere, okay? Well, I've got to split, Tim, give me a call on the boat when you get the Porsche home, okay? We should be still here."

"Alright. We'll go get it right now, Jack."

So Tim went upstairs to get his wallet and Jack was grabbing his helmet to take off. Suddenly he stopped and turned to see Molly standing there by his pool table and tilted his head "Thank you Lady Luck!" and before she knew it he had set down the helmet on the pool table, swiftly strode up to her grabbing her waist and kissed her fully on the lips.

He smiled at her there in his arms and then he turned around to jump on his bike leaving her there gasping. He fired up his bike, put on his helmet and saluted her as she stood there transfixed and before she knew it he flew out of there and sped into the night and was headed back to the Persian Gulf, half a world away.

They went straight away to find Steele and Molly knew where to find him of course – at the Trophy Lounge, a back parlor room. She glanced out as they pulled up, his red bobtail Peterbilt was in the alley - he was back in town.

"He's there."

Tim parked the Porsche. "Hang on there, young one." Tim said holding up a finger. He went to the trunk for his briefcase

and pulled out a clean sheet of paper and sat at the wheel to compose in black ink and in all caps like a quarterdeck log book entry. “Always get a receipt for things, Molly.” And he wrote out for extra insurance “This payment of $500 satisfies all debts owed Garret Steele by Jack McCracken.” And he dated it.

Steele was at the back bar talking to someone when they approached – a Philipina girl with only a handkerchief tied around her chest, skintight jeans and stiletto heals. Molly again noticed Steel’s gigantic arms – any girl could feel safe in – were bare and had Chinese tattoos of dragons – he, too was of the WestPac current. “Yes?” he inquired of Tim and blinked in surprise as he recognized Molly.

“Steele?”

“That’s me.”

“Remember me? I’m Tim McCracken - Jack’s cousin and he sent me over to pay his debt off.”

“What?” Molly noted that Steel’s wrist jerked a little as Tim said that and his mouth was grim – unhappy to being paid off – why would that be?

“If you will just sign this receipt, we’ll get out of your hair – or lack of it.”

Steele didn’t respond to the joke and took the paper and read it carefully and then signed it.

Tim counted out five big bills into Steele’s enormous hands. “Thanks.” He said and glanced keenly up to Tim, “How did he come by this?”

“You can ask him, yourself.” Tim said toughly refusing to divulge Jack’s business.”

‘He won it back!’ Molly thought: He won it back in your girlfriend’s bar! And she thought Steele might even know that.

“Of course.” Steele’s big fists balled crumpling the stack of bills. “Well, thank you.” He said and turned away without even looking at Molly again.

“That went weird.” Tim said walking out to the outer saloon. “Has Jack got drunk here and broke something or had a fight with Steele?” he said looking over to her as they left the bar. *Or gotten into Lola’s pants*? “Molly, tell me what’s going on.”

“I don’t know.” But she thought she might know – even as she still felt his lips upon her own - Perhaps--Perhaps Jack was messing with Steel’s girl and it looks like Steele knew about it too. But what was Steele doing with these girls here? It looks like he was in playing around on Lola as well. Poor Lola. Poor haughty Lola.

Brooding by Keilonies'

When Jack was gone to sea, times were slack around town and around home. Tim disappeared behind the paper, sports and work and Flo into the gossip of the salon. Molly lurked in the library aisles or wandered the port occasionally visiting the various port characters like Danny Fagan or Keiloni. She missed Jack rather roughly and tried to keep herself busy. On her mouth she still felt him and longed for him, though she knew he wasn't hers – not really. And yet sometimes he was always theirs and hers – as in ever, for-ever.

Brooding in the port in the seedy section she had forgotten where she was when she heard the swish-swish-swish of a broom.

"Well, well, there' Miss Molly Malloy all grown up now."

She laughed. "I guess I had to do it one day, Keiloni."

K. looked Molly over in her rough manner again – Molly had by then had lost the long shirt look, replaced by tight t-shirts and designer jeans and said with the tiniest small flicker cross her lips. "No, I like you better the old way." She teased and went on sweeping with a smile on her mouth.

"You mean shirttails and baseball cap, K.?"

"You look better as a boy." She laughed roughly pushing Molly out of her sweeping path, with her broom.

"Yeah, right!"

"Where's Jack?"

"He's out to sea."

"He's always out to sea."

"I know."

"When's he coming back."

"I dunno."

"Well, then who am I going to have to tease now that the weirdest person in port is all tidied up?"

"I was a tomboy… shoot, I *am* a tomboy..but I'm not weird." She'd struck a bone a bit.

She halted, "You were playing in my backyard! You were playing on the ships, in the shipyards, even on the friggin' cranes!" Keiloni put a hand on her hips and the broom in the other.

"I guess that was a bit weird.." Molly admitted and smiled at herself – Jacklike - as she remembered the great adventure of the cranes a few years back – rather Quixotic of her, because

she had made the cranes into the masts of tallships with the maurauding portrats. It was this creativity thing that she had…

"Aint no more salts any more!" K. went on sweeping down the alley.."Salty characters like Molly …and – Ha! Ha! - like Jack!"

Fire!

24 Oct 83
USS Marvin Shields
32’145’77” Indian Ocean,

He went TAD to The *USS Marvin Shields* to learn more of the new navigaton He was standing in front of his company reporting ‘all present or accounted for’ to the chief, and looking outwards to sea. It was great to be back out here, he thought and everything was going peachy, he was LPO and had his own crew and they were performing well, so there was not one reason in the world to be so cranky – not even the gitters were bothering him anymore but something was nagging at him for days now and he finally realized that he had a toothache. For days he struggled to ignore in when they could get into Bahrain, or a mail run, and then he couldn’t even put a way any food and the chief after catching him with his head in his hands in the galley finally ordered Jack to sickcall, and he found himself on the next run to the carrier *the Ranger* sitting in off Oman on station to get a filling on board. They flew over on a …..[details on trip over]

“That’ll make things better.” The doc said, cranking the chair up after he’d finished torchering Jack with needles and drills. And he left Jack to joke with the seaman with the Novocaine and claubermouth! “You know the Geneva Convention had outlawed torture years before in WWII…”

Suddenly an alarm intruded violently:

“DONK – DONK – DONK – DONK! ”

“Oh No!” the seaman uttered.

“DONK – DONK – DONK – DONK! ”

“Oh, shit, it’s a fire!” Jack said jumping out of the dentists chair and throwing the drapes on the chair. He’d been through enough of these now to go instantly into action.

“Fire on the --------“ All hands report to your fire stations, all hands! This is not a drill. Repeat. This is not a drill!”

The seaman standing there looked at Jack in alarm still with dental picks in his hands. “Get to your fire station, Jonesy.” He ordered the kid and ran to the hatch “I’ll pay the bill later!” and secured it behind him.

“DONK – DONK – DONK – DONK! ” The alarm went on and on

Jack ran out to the main passageway where everyone was running and Jack could already smell the smoke!

“DONK – DONK – DONK – DONK! ”

Around a corner he was now even seeing the smoke! A DC chief grabbed him and pointed to a station: “Grab some guys McCracken and get a hose in that compartment!” and at the

station he pulled on all the firefighting gear and strapped on the OBA mask. He'd been many years to sea now and they had drilled for this multiple times and, he'd fought actual fires and thus He knew what to do and he boldly ran to the passageway and pulled down the fire hoses secured to the bulkhead and got others to unwound them on the deck.

Someone fitted the hose to the fitting and he grabbed the nozzle boldly.

The damage control officer yelled "Get a hose on that compartment!"

"DONK – DONK – DONK – DONK! "

He grabbed four guys and directed them to pick up the hose and he grabbed the lead nozzle and they followed him deep into the passageways of smoke. The roar of the fire and smoke was beginning to muffle the fire alarms bells into the distance. "DONK – Donk – Donk – donk – donk – donk - donk! "

He could feel the slight warmth coming from the deck below him He yelled at a DCmen "Fire from below!!" but he tugged on the line to keep them marching into the blaze.

With an explosion of force on the hose he could feel the power of the water within the line now. And now he came to the after ammo deckwell – he could even see the armament a muffled boom deep within the ship told him that this was a major fire, and they were going into a war zone – on the front lines!

But now it was live or die! They were far from shore and there was no choice but burn or drown and they all went in desparately to quench her burning well deck!

He lead them in fiercly. It was now really hot and dark black smokey wind flew past them at tropical storm force strength and he blundered into the compartment further with the gigantic hose.

He Then in the midst of darkness he saw her flames in the distance through the inky black smoke.

"Come on!!" he yanked with his head.

They came up to the inferno "On the ready!!" he screamed and then he pulled on the nozzle and an immense torrent of water exploded out the line and they rocked backwards with it, but Jack tugged on them to march forwards.

Now they were closing in, the fire roared on an inferno and the jet that they pointed at it did little to quench it!! Soon, he had to pull back because it was getting the upperhand and he was feeling the heat, backwards they went, and forewards again and again they battled it and the hours went by. They were scorched and hot and coughing through the masks and covered in soot, when:

"Whuuuuuuuuuuuuu – Aooooooooooooooooooooommmmmmmmph!"

A wall of flame flew by and all around them – she had exploded all around them and knocked them all down. The hose wildly flew around the space knocking a sailor out who fell right into the flames. Now they were on fire too and guys on other lines behind them were dousing them now. And someone pulled him out of there and down the passageways away from the fire.

Two sailors were dragging him backwards on his heals to topsides where they layed him right on the bare flight deck – amongst the skidmarks of landing F-4s even, and a corpsmen were stripping his fire fighting gear which was completely charred. His eyes were burning savagely and he was having terrifying trouble with breathing and someone put on an 02 masks on him and sticking more needles in him. "More dental work?" he wandered woozily. From his position laying the deck he could see a enormous cloud of smoke billowing out surreally by the superstructure above them and he looked off the side - his own frigate was swinging-to sharply in a giant arch around the fantail to assist them. And guys all around him lay wounded in action like they had been in some kind of battle.

He felt like he had a bad sunburn all over his body and places roared with pain he began to drift in and out of consciousness. He figured out later when he woke up to intense roar of pain on his hands – they'd given him morphine. He'd gotten burn all over his body and places were first degree burns – on his hands and knees. He had heard himself begging for more shots and soon he was off, again in la-la land of the high – man, it beat drinking this stuff did, even if he had to get a little singed, he thought laughing at himself, to get some. He watched all the action around him in a detached zombie state, like one does a horror movie in slow motion. They were at it for hours and then the Arabian sun began shining down on him through the smoke made him moan in pain again, until they put him out – put him down, like one does a pet that's seen all its days.

Soon he too, wanted out of this craziness of the drug and wanted to help out again – it was the drug swooning and careening his better senses, he just wanted to go to chow now, that the little drill was over and he tried to get up – but he was now strapped down onto a stretcher, being tilted as it was loaded on a helo.

"Oh, shit!" he said waking up to it terrified and trying desparately to get off it and he panicked and struggled to get out of the straps. He hated stretchers with a claustrophobic passion!!

"Hey! What are you doing?" the corpsman asked him, pushing on his chest back down. He was an airborne corpsman in a flight suit.

He almost knocked the stretcher down and everyone was grabbing him, desparately.

"Put me down!" he screamed. His hands were on fire again! The morphine had suddenly ran out and he burned in agony.

"Come on, guy, come on, calm down!"

"What…where… Hey!"

His hands were bleeding all over his chest and he looked at them in terror mixed with horror they were charred black and red with blood!

"You're being flown to a hospital in Dubai, sailor!" And two corpsmen were each grabbing and wrapping a hand.

"Oh shit!" he screamed.

"It's going to be okay, sailor!!"

"And the fire?" he looked around bewildered. Smoke still billowed out everywhere – but it wasn't so black anymore.

"It's out now."

"Oh, thank God!" He relaxed backwards. And the corpsman smiled warmly at him and pressed the gause to his hands. The medicine was beginning to hit his veins again.

"What's your name, sailor?" the corpsman asked grabbing a clipboard."

"McCracken. J."

"What department are you with, McCracken, J."

"Shoot, I just wanted to get a filling!"

"You had dental work done, sailor?"

"Yeah. Didn't know I'd be firefighting today!"

"What department are you from."

And he was getting woozy again and jerked his chin starboard to his frigate.

"McCracken? Are you there? What department are you from?"

He pointed emphatically with his elbow to the frigate again but she had swung to port and he was looking for her wondering which one of his guys he was going to write up for dereliction of duty …

"You're from the *Marvin Shields?*"

"Yessir."

"Well, you've done a brave thing today, McCracken, J."

"Whatever." He laughed. "Just give me more meds, doc." And the corpsman put another batch under his skin and the rotors overhead began to turn and chop the air:

'POK POK POK POK POK POK POK POK---poc poc poc, pc, pc'

And that was the last thing he remembered onboard the *USS Ranger*.

He woke up days later in the hospital. He was with a whole gang of sailors. He had been burned head to toe, but somehow it was only third degree burns like a pretty darn bad sunburn and except for his knuckles where he'd been holding the nozzle directly into the flame and he had first degree burns on them and they were wrapped in large bandages, making eating, drinking or anything difficult. If only this wasn't the Middle East, some cut blonde nurse like Amanda would be spoonfeeding him now his chow, and they sent some Pakistani guys in, so he figured out how to delicately fend for himself.

Places in his hair were burned and even his eyelashes felt short and stubby. But overall he had faired well this made him feel pretty darn lucky. How many promotion points would that little firefight earn him for staying in the Nav? He could rest easy now and that put him in a great mood, so he gingerly from his hospital bed he called up his cousin and then Penny.

"Cupcake." He whispered hoarsely.

"Jaaaaaaaack!" she gasped never expecting to hear from him and her eagerness tickled him.

"Where are you!"

"I'm in a hospital in Dubai."

"What!!!!!!!! Are you okay?"

"Well…" he laughed "I'm just a little 'well-done'."

"What!"

"Well, we had a little fire aboard ship."

"I heard on the news! You were in it?!"

"Yeah…"

And he told her of his little fire fighting adventure. She was gasping at every sentence he spoke. It was rather gratifying to have this gorgeous cheerleader all for himself. "I'll probably get a letter of commendation, I hope…"

"I wish I was there." She confided.

"Why?"

"To help you."

"Ah, I'm okay." He laughed. "It's just good for my career this. I was worried about it, okay?"

"But…

"It was just funny, y'know – I go to get a filling and next thing you know, I'm in a firefight for my life!"

"That's funny?'

"Well, I guess you had to be there."

"A little fire, a little pain, but! a mended career."

Now, he thought, all's I want is a drink!

The days passed he got better and better. They had formed friendships in the hospital and gave each other nicknames like "Sparky" and "Top Sirloin" and "Sizzler". His shipmates called him "Rocky" because with his hands wrapped he looked like a boxer. The ten badly burnt guys had been shipped out now to Germany by now and soon they were getting more back to themselves. He had a few marks now to add to his tattoos and glory and soon they were going out on stretches around the square and bazaar – like tiny little liberties and would have even chased a few skirts and had a few drinks if they hadn't been in a moslim country. And he remembered his little blonde Yeoman Rosey was now on the Atlantic Fleet, was actually stationed nearby in Bahrain, and she flew over to tend to him for four days.

Then they flew him to Germany where he recovered a few more weeks in the Army's major hospital there in Ramstein. And finally he went the long flight home on a medivac flight and they all picked him up at NAS North Island one night and took him and his seabag to the towering barracks at 32nd street NAVSTA, where, as a first class he got a room to himself.

"Don't you want to stay at home with us?" Tim asked.

"Nope, I just want to be left alone." He said.

"Okay, well you just call us anytime, Jack, if you need anything at all."

"Thanks, Cuz."

He embraced them all, and they saw not a singed hair of him for over one month.

"What's going on with Jack?" Flo had asked Tim one night a whole month later. "We haven't seen him since he got back."

"Maybe he's busy with that girl…

"No I did her hair yesterday. She says he's been a real hermit lately."

"Well, that is unusual. Maybe he's not feeling well. Molly and I'll go by there after her doctor's appointment tomorrow and check in on him."

The next day they found his room in the towers at 32nd street and knocking they heard "Come in."

"Hey Cuz. Hey doll." He said to Molly hugging her carefully.

"You all right Jack?

"Yeah." He said sitting down in the recliner. He was in his PT shorts and t-shirt and shower shoes. His hands were still in bandages. They sat on his woolen blanket on his bed.

"Well, we just haven't seen you. Thought you might be ill."

"No, I've been taking it easy."

"Thought you might be with Penny."

"Naw…" his eyes were on the game. "Just relaxing."

Molly observed Tim's wide open eyes, taking it in, it all. There weren't even cigarettes laying around. Tim was grabbing his shirt pocket looking for some. "I quit." Jack said reading Tim's mind, who was digging in his pocket for his lighter. "I'm not too fond of any kind of fire anymore."

"I bet!"

"You go ahead, though, Cuz." And Tim lit up – he had too. "Oh, sorry, I don't have a beer to offer you." Jack said, his eyes still locked on the TV.

That's what had struck Tim. "That's quite alright, Jack." He said with the cig in his mouth. "That's quite alright."

He laughed a little at himself "I haven't had a beer since I've been back. Shoot, I have'nt had once since we left Ramstein."

"Really! What's bringing on the change?" he blew out.

"I don't know. I guess having a room to myself."

"Right." Tim was eagerly nodding."Maybe all you needed was a little space."

"Yeah", and he remarked on his shore billets on Subic Bay and Yokusuka – where months sometimes went by without even a single beer. And Jack was a mystery to himself and he would forget that alcohol had a grip on his heart as strong as any woman's hand.

"I should try to get a shore billet someday and whip this thing for good."

"Yeah Jack. You seem at peace."

"Yeah." He said and he was back off and away.

She'd never seen this side of jack before – quiet, calm and rather mysterious. She swallowed heavily – of only he could stay like this – at peace. "Can't you Jack…" she wanted to say, to nag, no, to plead: 'Can't you just stay like this? Why do you have to always be so popular, so outgoing? It's like its driving you to the drink, when I like you when you're quiet.' She watched him and Tim they were mumbling a little here and there about the game; they were at such peace together. She was looking at who Jack really was without all that glory, for the very first time and even Tim looked over to Molly in silent agreement and as if reading her mind.

Perhaps it was all the moves, all the ships, all the duty stations and all the languages he'd had to learn to live his life overseas that had made him an outgoing star, who's fuel was booze to conquer the real Jack, who was just a quite guy - but, wonderful, nevertheless. He was comfortable in his little nook, in their lives, where, he smiled and was calm. And they liked him for whom he really was. Then Jack turned to her suddenly and

gave her his greens and a twinkle and a rush like the squalls of oncoming winds before a storm.

*THE DAGGERS OF THE GULF (a summary of world events tied to this era of Jack's story) - FINISH

The headlines helped them all keep track of their men for the months they'd packed off to sea were full of world crunching events. The USS had _____ and the _____ and Saddam Hussien had fired and _____

It was this time LT Kelly's plane flew off the catapult and crashed into the Persian Gulf. He found himself on Point Loma attending his funeral on the Point Loma hillside.

**PRINCE OF LIBERTYTOWN – REDO SOME

After that he was even more distant and stayed away from his little family in Liberty Town, becoming more and more into the high velocity of his girl friend's society. Who could blame him, for Penny obviously adored him and he was actually entertaining ideas of settling down for once: this one was just to amazing to throw aside, like all the others. It was like a fairytale to Jack, but – it was too weird to be its princess.

One evening while biking, Molly spied Jack getting out of a Cadillac in front of a swanky downtown restaurant in the Lamplit district. 'Bob' Chamberlain was in shotgun seat. Jack wore nice, new expensive clothes, and she could see him square his shoulders upon stepping out under the gas lamps that lined the street. Man - If he'd seen her like that she probably would have never talked to him, again. she would have scurried away like a rat... a port rat that she was... .

Jack now went, though he'd seldom gone there before.. did he start to like them, then?

She saw them go into an elegant sports bar there, and a place where booze freely flowed and the establishment reigned and the male handshakes and back pats that they gave each other, when accepted by the ruling class, the ruling male class… yes, Jack was being launched into a fraternity of powerful men and into the stratosphere - without them! Where was Rick, Tim? No,

it was more than that, it was Jack and his high flying presence, his mental toughness combined with the charm of many a year on a carrier out to sea. He was so above Molly and she'd known that all along, of course... and he was exciting and fascinating to them, and a part of her admitted that they were right - she thought... well they were loosing him to upper society and she was sad that he'd forget them... and she biked away - clank, clank, clank... on her old rusty cycle.

"Where be thy Jack?" he slurred out. "Don't he socialyze with the loikes of us n'moire?" It'd been months since he'd seen Jack, who was quite a regular in the Waterline Tavern.

Her mind turned again to Jack and could he ever stop drinking. Where in the world was he these days? Had he forgotten them?

Maybe Denny'd sing a sorrowful song for her if prodded... "He's moved up, Denny."

She had consoled myself down to the wharf tavern and found Denny Faegan sitting at his piano bar, half way drunken – he was back at it again - and mesmerized by Jack's sudden transformation. Jack was so central in their lives, that when he was gone the whole dang town seemed lonely and quiet. And now Jack was leaving them, for the good life upstairs, and they felt a sadness descend over Libertytown, as if they were not enough anymore for the ravenous Jack.

Denny had a Navy style canvas covered logbook, that was for his journal and soliloquays when he was terrible besotted with booze and could scarcely play at the keys. He was such a personality and good for business even drunk that he basically made money sitting and drinking and entertaining his little cocktail sipping court around the baby grand. Knowing what an old-time spin he'd put on Jack's new ways, Molly waited for him to sit behind the keys again, stuffing two crumply pocket dollars in a mason tip jar, while asking him - as if he were a fortune-teller with songs: "Maybe he loves her, Denny?"

He replied in a few chords of ragtime intro:

Fleet Sailor Jack!
Up'd from the sailor side
To Uptown
by bride!

Say: You do belong to We
Come back, our Jack!
To we, we of the lowly,
highly sheltering sea!"

Denny shut the lid with a snap, receiving the sparse applause mostly obligatory from the waiters, with a bow, as if it were an ovation, and oh! he seethed in fumes and poems! How she cherished that Denny Fagan dealt with sadness with elequance of his art. He hit the keys again to pound more old-time jigs: His words hit her..'Jack don't belong to us n'more

Jack now sailed before them like a worthy ship and like one of whom is borne to be loved. He began to reign in businesstown in its ensconced fraternity of power, not like a son that been born of towering WestPac's Typhoon Season, nor drunken Bremerhavener cobbles. And like a Jackmother she was proud of him - of his walk and talk- she'd never seen him translated into upper society and he had already had that poise - even the skipper of the *Constellation* had seen that, though he'd busted Jack, he had soon after made him the 1MC announcer on the boat. Majestically Jack graduated out of our class and onto another higher, slicker social, a Glenlivet Scotch in snifter glass-society, a golf links, power brokering sort, who's country club lawns walled up away a fraternity with select invitation only. In short, they were not invited, though he, too sailed off the *sweat of their own backs and our own woes of the Jackwatch on the railway tracks*!

Like a judge, she watched the case of Rick for precedence - Rick often bridged gaps in social kind being of such elegance. What kept Rick in the smoky pubs and in the fleet, when his manners were of this aristocracy? Then she realized in a stroke of comparison that made me feel too much judgmental and not good, but it was very true indeed: Jack was borne of a time when he'd tear out his own heart. The calamities of which Rick knew nothing of had enlarged Jack's heart, even under such a curse of the drink. That was why most people usually took what Rick said lightly - because he had the charm without the great big heart and which came off as just another sailor line.

"Let his keel hit the reef" an old mate told me from the Triangle club, which AA called it "bottoming out" which she wondered had Jack not done that more than once? And yet, the Chamberlain set lifted him up and out of this most necessary abyss.

Older now, she began to realize that good intentions to not cavort around might not last long.nd maybe imminent dallying was really more than she could bear. Perhaps with the lushland of drinks now available, he'd give in and she feared he'd be trapped forever after that..

For with Jack, even the Richies knew it, they had in him a heart they could mine... full of heart stuff like gold - making him a good investment with a high payoff, like a treasure,

sunken galleon off the Keys. And Jack was tall and mannerly; his appearance caused great desire of both male and female, for he had a heart borne of suffering and shame in his sojourn in a sea of woes, like one from whom we all would delight, he was beloved, and we'd follow him anywhere... and oh, not to forget the hand of the town's 'princess' Penny Chamberlains, a fairytale of seatown and of the land barons.

They just didn't know about the gutters of Jack and of despair. Maybe Jack'd remember how many a time they'd pulled him from them.

Of Jack, who began to thrive in the ways of downtown who walked on the golfed meadowlands of city princes and of financial kings, she dreamed... that he'd would say to them all lest he was pressed to follow and conform in words like Danny's Chantee *"I am a free sailorman, am I borne!"*

Though she betrayed never her heart's tidings for Jack, he plotted the course from her wide.. and she never let on that she saw it, lest she lose her lifelong friend, godfather and... . but, like Danny song, he had been indeed 'upped' from all of us, suddenly, they who'd stuck with his ever stormy sea. She was so downcast - and he was so upcast! Did he not value her anymore - preferring luxurious cuisine to a home cooked good meal?... Man

She felt cheapened by his withdrawal, like he hadn't seen the richness of the common folk as worthy? Like a good family they had borne him in many a troubled tour and he'd grown up, WestPac prodigal and now, unlike a son he was growing away for good.

Thus she began her long struggle to let go … with a Bonnie-like shrug, and with the wizened ways of the weathercock at attention arooftop, she once again awaited the veering of the winds.

The Clock Garden

She found herself again in town, wondering around wondering where Jack was, that she could find him and just be glad to fish the piers with him or, have a soda in the saloons while he shot pool and partied with just everyone; and well, just be his buddy again. But nowhere could he be found and the winds were picking up past the point and the palm trees were rustling swaying in their abandon, they too, wondering where was their town prince. It was a lonely sound, the wind was, always chiding one, always stranding one into believing only that they were the only, only ones loveless upon this earth.

Straddling adulthood and childhood, she too was straddling love and longstanding friendship against this other thing too, that Jack was amazing and belonged to everyone all around, until life chopped him down with an axe of misfortune and drink and he appeared back home, back to his cousins house and secretly she thought, back to her house where, he was somehow always hers.

And yet, he was fleeting, somehow, disapeering into something somewhere, which was what then; but the agony of the deep primordial WestPac, its malarial chills down his spine.

But she really knew where he was now, he was on the yacht with Penny and her ultra-expensive world and Molly knew his secrets now, that no girl of Penny's sort would ever know.

One afternoon she walked along Market street, when in elegant party she overheard at the Clock Garden cafe, there satd Jack, Robert Chamberlains, Penny and Charlene Jackson and some other well healed ladies so elegantly attired Penny was talking across the table loudly to her mother, Charlene. Robert and Jack sat at opposite ends of the table, while the four women chatted happily away. Molly strode up the street as she did nearly everyday of her life and suddenly she felt like a big walking target walking by. 'Oh, God let them not see me.'

"Oh! Boy! Hey you boy!" cried out Penny, who very well knew who Molly was.

Molly could not flee, nor could she stay there she saw Jacks free-loving eyes bore holes into the tablecloth 'He's ashamed of me!'

Then she cunningly laughed "Oh.. Ha! I thought you were the news boy Molly!" And the ladies whispering to each other about her - right in front of her, in front of Jack. She left there with her face burning red!

She fled straightaway burning with shame! She looked in a restaurant window - less and less like a boy but now incongruous or odd, like something in between two worlds, amorphous,

sexless, in short, weird. She even looked like a dike! She was horrified! And finally she began to see the reason in her Mama's ways - they were defensive - If you weren't so different, no one could pick on you so easily. Walking along the quay by the *Star of India* – a historical masted sailing ship she began to see the problem in another light, as she imagined he'd climbed the masts of such ships - when the wind teased her hair and she had a moment of intense insight and she let her long hair down to be blown around by the seabreazes.

It wasn't just that Penny now had her Jack, it was something else that only heartbreak could teach, that Molly wasn't who she wanted to be, but a gangly, nerdy, overly kiddish person. Jack was her other self – maniacally popular, lushly superconfident and far from the oddball that she was, for he was cool, charming and her complete opposite.

Up to now he had always spoiled her with himself and she'd never needed to have what he had because he'd always given it to her and to Flo and even to Tim. She had fallen in love what she had wanted to be, and since he could never be hers anymore again, she had wanted what Jack had, and the Navy was offering it to her if she would take it with the storms as teachers and seas as parables. She needed two years before the mast to pursue who she was to grow out of herself and into her Jack, for her pseudo-father and teacher was leaving and she, though only eighteen, was wise enough to see it, thanks to Bonnie's passdown of wisedom. It was not just that she loved Jack, she had wanted to be Jack.

In a startling clear moment, she too, saw the little gang playing, she realized that she, too, Jacklike, had deserted them, in her growing up and out and they came around her quietly she were some strict adult. She'd start her new self with them and what would Jack do, she suddenly said..' "Hey gang let's go to the ice cream store - I am buying!"

"Oh Goody!" They jumped up, released in their happiness Molly became again glad'.

And then the dreams came… dreams of her father came once again..then he had been taken, taken away from her by the sea, *she, sweatly savage and had laid his body to rest, while unenchaining the spirit to stalk free the depths, wherein her imagination had lain him, banished to where mermaidens and seamonsters swum in constant delirium coinciding with the yim and yaw of her young heart…*

It's Okay to Love Jack

And the trades that blew brought the follows as such... One day Penny sported a two caret solitaire diamond to the salon and her Mama passed the news gently to Molly one night, coming in her room, sitting besides her as if to tell her bedtime tales of knights in white horses – which Jack had once been to her and that legend was lost, and, she believed, gone for evermore.

Not such a stone… she began a long sojournin this thought singing to herself in the mirror: *He loved her and all that she stood for; and, alas, he was their Jack no more.*

Days went by, though and she could no longer overcome her feelings, to the salon she went where they were each other's solace and psychologists and when she could bear her cross no more she went back to Bonnie's station, where her most wizened and wonderful listener worked the hairs of San Diego, perhaps gleaning wisdom from all these wire like connections to the minds of the folks and wisdom of the masses.

"Gosh. Bonnie. Jack is going to marry Penny."

"I know, Molly, your Mom told me."

Molly could barely speak and her mentor looked away from the head, to give her a sympathetic smile and connect Molly with eyes of polished ebony.

"Bonnie, I'm going to go out with Steele and well anybody. It'll help me forget Jack in that way." His unobtainable jewel-eyes flashed before her.

She smiled a smile of deep knowing. "Molly, it's okay to love Jack."

In silence Molly felt the waves pounding the shoreline of her young heart.

Doris said cigarette in mouth, rollers clumped on head like some kind of ridiculous biker's helmet. "Oh yeah, she loves him." and she wanted knock the rollers off her head! A bit like Jack in that, she was.

"What do you mean?" Molly slunk down in the stall chair next to Bonnie and implored the faith out of her face, glad Mama was gone.

"I feel your struggle with it - you *love* him." She glanced to Molly her head high like a princess, she was proud and serenly sure of her own words, and so full of radiant Spanish beauty that Molly just couldn't believe that Jack had let her go. "And I certainly know what you're going through."

Molly just sat there as the truth stunned her. It was true and she faced it for once with Bonnie's expert aid.

“Stop fighting it, Mol.” She said gently, while stirring some noxious potion. “You can’t fight it. You’ll only suffer more – I know.”

The old lady laughed at her and she could feel her fingers gripping the chair in rage. Bonnie serenely ignored her head high like a queen.

"Look, Molly, Jack is every woman's dream, for he's charming, he's handsome, he likes to be with you: he's every woman's dream."

“He wasn’t *your* dream, Bonnie.”

“But dreams don’t last, Moll, you wake up in the morning.”

She just smiled to the riddle of what became them.

Not one to tolerate a mystery like that Molly pressed her again on her feelings about Jack.

“That’s cuz I know him.” She said softy while unravelling the rollers.

"Yet you once said. 'Jack is a ‘free agent' and he belongs to no one 'cept the sea.'

"Yes, that is unfortunately true as well." She said wrapping the head. “Loving Jack is letting him go.”

"I know about that now."

"Well, so you were listening."

"Yeah, quite well. So I know now what I want."

"What's that?" She said with pins in her mouth.

"A date with someone else!"

They all laughed heartily and Molly looked around acutely embarrassed.

"Well, that'll make everyone feel better. Including your parents."

"For sure, even me!"

"Bonnie, I want you to lighten my hair. After her."

"Alrighty." She said teazing the fresh locks. “But only a little – or your Mom will kill me.”

And her words were healing "it's okay to love Jack" for: *the truth will set you free* and in her freedom it brought about an end to the ceaseless struggle that she had had over him and an peace and inner acceptance of that fact that she loved him, despite himself, as a young lady, not as a friend, not as the uncle/godfather he certainly also was - at the very same time, but as a man; a man to hold in her very arms, a man to call her very own. Thus she realized that Jack was many things to her as well as to many others... she had a sudden flashback to her and Bonnie finding him dead drunk on the railroad tracks - but he didn't belong to anyone, really, except that!

But, if anyone was close to him, though, it would have been Molly and her mother after all these years since Olangapo. And with that wonderful peace in her young heart, onward she

struggled to try to think of a life without her Jack, but always somewhere to sea - her family's sea – ever and ever.

***PENNY'S SCHOOL FUNDRAISER-MAKE ACTIVE AND LONGER

After she'd given the orphanage all that money – though even Penny would admit it wasn't her own, but her father's, that life had changed a bit, it had become sweeter with helping those poor little kids and Penny decided to do a little fundraising herself – using her daddy's yacht and the varsity squad of the USD cheerleaders.

**RELIEVED OF DUTY – MAKE IT A SCENE NOT JUST A RECAP

Jack comes back from this all-nighter on Penny's yacht and is still drunk and can't assume watch – and Chief Belt does it for him – ominously, not even writing Jack up – an awful foreboding thing that Jack shares with no one – he knows he's going to get canned.

And he had told no one this, even his cousin, that the chief had caught him coming in from an all night party on Penny's Yacht – with her **pack of cheerleaders – and relieved him of duty – drunk on duty!! This time chief had only wri**tten him up, he hadn't even formally charged him with the dereliction – and Jack was so unsure of what that meant. Did it mean that they were writing him off and giving up on him? Or, did it mean the brig was just full?

Molly and the Nav

And once she realized what she felt, it cleared up her mind a great deal and she found her step father engrossed in the *Union Tribune*.

"Tim?" Molly approached her stepfather cautiously awaiting for a Saturday when her mother was at the salon for a big wedding and she had him to herself – along with the paper.

"Yes" the paper said without moving.

"I've been wanting to chat with you about something."

"About what?"

"Well… I've been thinking about what I'm going to do with myself for a living, for a career, I mean."

"Thought you wanted to go to San Diego State." It said.

"Yeah, maybe, eventually."

"And?"

"Well, I was first thinking about joining the Navy and maybe getting some college funds first."

The paper actually fell down in half and two large hazel eyes appeared over the top of it.

"Oh." He said "You're kidding me?"

"No."

He paused, leaning forwards to look at her as if he'd never seen her before. "Woe…"

"I just need to talk it over with someone with experience."

"Your mom is going to murder you."

"I know, that's why I'm coming to you first." In fact, she had just begun realized that she had been coming a lot more to him lately instead of her mother – like with the driving lessons he'd given her recently and she felt a kind of closeness in that.

"I can't talk her into anything about that."

"Yes, I know that, Tim. I just want some advice about which rate to choose and etc."

"Gees Molly, are you sure you want to do that?"

"Well, I always had it in the back of my head."

"Oh really?" he was now appraising her like a Naval Chief.

"I took the ASVAB at school a few days ago, by the way, and I scored pretty good for some stuff. Then I went to the recruiter the other day and…"

"You've already gone to a recruiter on your own?" he marveled at her independence and maturity.

"Yes, I have…"

“Really, Molly!” he just sat there stunned looking at her and put down his paper. She smiled at that, it was the first time that it had ever happened.

Just then they heard Jack’s motorcycle pull up and then he was striding on in with his leathers still on. And despite her resolve her heart skipped a beat. She hadn’t seen him in two solid months!

“Hey, Mol.” He said. And hugged her. “Where ya been?” he joked off his absence.

“Hi Jack.”

“Ready to go Tim?”

“Huh? Oh sorry, I forgot Jack. I’ll get ready in a minute.” And Tim got up. “Yeah, Jack, Molly was just telling me something very, very interesting news, weren’t you Mol? And I got distracted a little bit.”

“Who’s the new boyfriend?” Jack teased her as they all did and tickled her ribs.

Tim yelled from their bedroom. “Molly wants to join the Navy!”

Jack just staired at her wild-eyed and then breathed out a hiss, “Now why in hell do you want to do a thing like that?”

Tim called out buckling up from the bedroom, “Dang, Jack you’re sounding worse than Flo’s going to be!”

“You’re mom doesn’t know just yet?”

“No, I was just tossing the idea around with my step-daddy before I talk to her and…”

“Molly I prohibit you from doing this.” He said so suddenly and out of line that Molly laughed a little and uttered a nervous “What?”

She caught a whiff of beer on his breath.

Tim called out “Gees Jack, you giving Molly some practice to deal with her mother about this?”

“I mean…I don’t want you to do this!”

“But Jack I’m 18 now and I am an adult…”

“…an adult! You’re just still a kid!”

“I’m of legal age now to do whatever I want and I…”

“Yeah, and have I not been in your life since you were four! I’m like your fricken godfather for godsake! And you’re not going to listen to me?”

“I honestly thought you would be happy for me.”

“Well I’m not -- and I’m not going to be.”

“But…”

“Look you, I promised your father I’d…”

And he stopped.

“Jack, I …”

“Have you even given college a chance, Mol?”

“No, I mean, I don’t know.” She stuttered, tripped up.

"Look, let me take you up there on Monday after watch and let's have a second look around about college and take some placement tests. You promise me you'll do this first?

"Yes, Jack."

He found himself shaking – was it just the drink? - and he added: "And no signing nothing with a recruiter unless I or your Daddy go with you, okay?

"Okay, Jack."

Tim came out dressed in his black leathers and laughing. "Well, Jack you saved me all kinds of lectures."

"Hmmph! Unbelievable!" he glared at Molly and he strode out the door with a bang leaving Molly and Tim just stairing at each other in disbelief themselves. "Guess he doesn't like the idea."

'Is this what it is like to have a Daddy,' thought poor Molly,

The next Monday was a classic day with Jack – first a ride on his bike was always fun – and kind of special, then he personally escorted her to the various departments on the campus, with personal opinions on everything. His longtime sponsoree 'Jezzy' was going to medical prep school now and Jack commented on many fields available in the college for Molly from an X-ray technician to a licensed nurse; none of which pleased Molly.

"Well, let's go to the career center and see if you can take some placement tests." He said undaunted and cheerful. For support, he sat down beside her and merrily took the test too, whistling under his breath as he did so.

When they had finished, the counselor scored her test and pointed out that Molly was Sensing-Feeling-Expressive Personality which would be great in anything involving art or writing and handled her pamphlets on graphic design and journalism, which Jack discussed with her at length, that one would think that this was his career or even his daughter.

"And you, sir, would you like your results now."

"Sure." Jack said smiling and leaning forwards in anticipation.

"You scored high as a People-Oriented, Leadership and Caring fields. People helping skills are at a premium in fields like Nursing, Physical Therapy and.."

The word stung his lips: 'Nursing!" and aside to Molly he hissed "Dog Poop!"

"What! It's what you recommened it to me, Jack."

"It's not a guy's kind of job!" he said, punching his own fist in aggravation!

"So! You'd be fabulous in it Jack."

"Says who!"

"Says me! After all the work with the orphans – what you did for free you'd get well paid for…"

"BS!"

"You're a natural at it."

The counselor interrupted. "Well, this type of personality is also good with people in management and sales."

"Yeah, I'd make a good used-car salesman schmuck!!" He said. He was getting highly irritated and vexed. "I know about that sales crap already."

Drunk on duty, oh God, drunk on duty!!!

"What about the orphans, though, Jack. They love you and…"

"The orphans!" the counselor interrupted astounded. "Are you that sailor that helps all those kids!"

Drunk on duty! He'd been drunk on duty!!

"Yes he is." Molly said.

"Oh my gosh! I saw you on the news a few years back and I gave some to the orphanage."

"Oh, good." He said, but his arms were folded and cross, he was vividly recalling his chief finding him slurring while tossing on his crackerjack!

"You've become a big hero to a lot of people around downtown, Jack!" she said. "Everyone in this office donated to your charity!"

"Oh." He uncrossed his arms and looked around bewildered.

"Hey, Janice! Come here! This is Jack McCracken everyone. He's that orphanage-guy that we all gave to last year."

"Oh, yeah!"

And about six ladies were gathering around and Jack who was sitting there turning red with embarrassment and anger, yet trying to be civil at the same time and grateful for their generosity.

"Wouldn't he make a great nurse?" The counselor sounded off. "I remember footage of you in the Philipines bottle-feeding an infant. Oh, we were all so touched by it." Jack had donned a lab coat for the promo and then was giving them medicines – laughing at his role as fake doctor, Molly remembered – but it brought in the orphanage lot's of bucks and they had all remembered that – all of Libertytown.

And Jack's face went red and he was crouching down now slightly as if under air assault or still upon the flight deck.

"So many guys just want to party and play in the Philipines and here you were helping all those kids. I'll never forget that! You were so very different from all the rest…"

"Oh yeah, he's a natural nurse."

"Oh yeah he is."

"I thought he was a nurse, Jean. Wasn't he?" They gabbled on as if he wasn't there.

"No he's a sailor."

"Aren't you a corpsman?"

"No, he's a master something. Master of Arms?"

"Quartermaster." Molly answered.

Molly heard him cuss silently under his breath.

"Jack, lots of people are getting into nursing – all kinds including men – big burly men like yourself."

His eyes were getting big in fright.

"Poor guy!"

"Alright ladies, let's leave the poor guy alone!"

And, chuckling, they subsided and he breathed out a "Whew!" and Charlene, the counselor tried to suppress a smile and a warm laugh at him.

But Molly was back on the main: "How about all this RIFting in the Navy, Jack, shouldn't you at least look into another career?" resuming the pressure upon him deliberately.

"Oh that!" he shook his head," I'll find someway of staying in… I've got to! Nursing, my butt!" Just thinking of the Rifting put him in a savage mood and he clinched his hands in aggravation. "Boring as hell…" he spat. But his savage aggravation was more about 'the terrors' again. He began to shake and feel his skin crawling and slithering as they spoke.

"Maybe they're too boring for me too, Jack." Molly said.

"Oh come on now Molly!" he began to roar like his old man again. Damn.

"If you won't take your own advice, then why should I?"

His eyes went wide open at her stark assertion. "Let's go outside and talk about this, young la-dy!"

"Excuse us." Molly offered the rather surprised counselor, who watched them from the window walk out to the center of the quad well away from everyone. Jack's hands were in balls.

"Look, Molly, I didn't want to tell it to you this way, but, look, you're just too innocent and young. I don't want to see you spoiled by all the guys out there. Look, just because these aren't right for me doesn't mean you shouldn't do them…

"They bore me as they bore you."

He looked as if he'd been slapped, but he swallowed and then tried another tactic: "Well, now I thought you were going to go to the San Diego State."

"I was, but I wanted to see the world first, experience a few things, like you have, like Tim has..."

"You'll see the ports in the Pacific, it's not a thrill as you'd think.."

"That's not what I've grown up with, Jack. I've grown up with you and your stories: Of Hong Kong, Singapore, Manilla."

"Me and my stories? What have I done!" he put his hand through his hair – a distress sign, surely, but why?

Then she remembered that he had kissed her in the Den.

"Jack, why is this upsetting you so?"

"Look at me, Mo, I'm a big, tough guy."

"And?"

"And you're not. You're innocent, you're pretty… I don't want you to go!" his stomach was quivering now.

"I think I can handle myself. I've always been all over the port and No one messes with me in the port now, why should they then?"

"So, you're not going to listen to me, afterall these years in your life, is that what it is!" he was reminding himself of his old man now – a tower of roaring rage and he tried to calm himself down somehow!

"Of course, I'm listening, Jack."

"Just trust me, then. I don't want this for you. And neither do your parents!"

"Okay."

She didn't see any valid or logical points he'd made, but he was getting more and more upset, so she went along with and pretended that she was interested in the careers he offered.

They drove home and in the driveway he had calmed down and he asked "so, did I change your mind?"

"Sure, Jack, I'm thinking about all these things." But she had actually grown more and more interested in the Navy!

"Great!" he said relieved.

"And have I changed your mind?"

"About what?" he looked over sharply in surprise.

"About your career."

"Oh, that." He breathed out "No, Mol, I'm 'haze gray and all the way'. There's no other life for me, Miss Mo, but the sea."

And she had felt the same for, she was born in and around it and herself had never considered a life away from the Navy, or from her precious sailor Jack.

New Orders

USS _____

One evening she came home to a quiet house - no Mama stationed in the kitchen over the blue gas flames or onion chopping board. It was a ghost house. As she went up to her room, she heard faint crying somewhere lost. She sought out the source and found Mama's room darkened in the dim light of the evening. She lay on the bed, her back to the door. "Mama?"

No answer.

She lay down by her and massaging her back as she used to as a child right after Daddy died.” What’s wrong Mama?"

Her finger pointed to the lamp stand. She reached over her and turning on the bed stand light, she saw a Navy comm message. She deciphered all the code down all the abbreviations CINCPACFLT, PERSUPDET etc, etc, and addresses until she got to the heart of the matter way down the page:

"Detaching Chief Tim McCracken from NTC San Diego. Report to Commanding Officer, USS_____."

"Tim's being transferred... " Molly said breathlessly, feeling stabbed herself. Flo just lay there, Navy widowed again, for more years, undone by needs of a service, far greater than her own.

They had him for one month more. Oh!

And they had known about the PCS for years now, being Navy brats, but, by gosh, it had still managed to sink their hearts, anyways. And suddenly she was realizing something about Tim, something she had liked, and with a heart wrench, she realized she was sad.

Sunday, Tim was interested in going to church and a truce of solemn peace filled their household, Mama being such the life of it that Molly and Tim really noticed when she was down. The house was quiet, dull, unattended.. This being a time Jack's boat was about to deploy to sea also, it hit Molly pretty darn hard. At least they had a bit warning about Tim at least...

Bonnies wedding

She next saw Jack at Bonnie's small wedding ceremony at the courtyard of the Hotel Del Coronado and she stood in a long emerald dress a with a rack of hair of stiff shelacted ringlets, matching the wedding uniforms of Bonnie's three cousins from Spain and her Mama who was crying by her side the entire ceremony. The dashing and nervous O'Meara proud in Marine Corps dress blues, accompanied by squad of bayonet bearing Marines, to underwhich they passed betrothed. And then the path came the Spanish beauty Bonnie proud calm and radiant. What a chill went down her spine…what a fabulous lady she was! How honored to be her maid of honor Molly was.

A small congregation of Marines and sailors and her mother and her father. To Jack's credit he was invited to his ex's wedding along with Penny. O'Meara treated Jack with obvious respect at his gracious way of releasing Bonnie. Afterwards, of course rubbing it in that she had chosen a Marine.

"She just had to choose the best branch, that's all." Said the enormous Gunny.

And to aside "It was nice of you to come Jack."

"Wouldn't miss it for the world, Bon. Glad you found somebody so good to you -- even if he is a Marine."

"She just choose the better branch!" Sean said.

"Thanks, Jack." She laughed and they hugged as long time friends and as grace begets tenderness and courtesy begets respect.

A lovely but modest luncheon they had on the elegant veranda facing the Pacific, and Molly ever by Bonnie's side ignoring all other Jack-passions but to give homage to her most wonderful friend, for 'Maid of Honor' she was that day! She'd never even considered herself in Bonnie's league, but she had, in part, raised Molly, and the honor belonged to her! And yet she'd given it freely, as she always did. What a fine lady she was…she'd gotten chills thinking this! She was queenly in her beauty, of Queen Esther in the Bible! Oh, what a fine, fine friend she'd been! She had felt rich in her friends, and Bonnie had been her finest jewel!

A slight backing of the wind's directions in the palms lining the shore reminded her, too that Bonnie would go away when her husband got new orders, Molly realized suddenly standing there besides her on the veranda watching the palms lean into the windpuffs, to follow her O'Meara, to where? She scanned in her head the world for they had bases spanning the

globe! Where to? Bahrain? DC? Kaneohe? El Toro? Cherry Point? Yokusuka? Sigonella, Sicily? 'Well, darn it!! I'd just have to travel a lot more, because I'm not letting go of her too!'

Sean, as she now called Bonnie's husband, intro'd her to one of his bayonet bearing honor guard and she had her first real date with a marine a few days later, but he deployed to Beirut right after that.

She found the portrats in pleasant pursuits and joined them in romps, but really she was just looking back on her childhood and saying 'bye bye'.

Other days she simply walked the streets in the early morns with notebook in hand, visiting Danny Faegan at times, who had become now sick and crumpled but could still beguile her with words of The Sea.

Insert a picture or icon here

Lola

It was on one of these renewed romps with the portrats she saw something, something that shook this new cozy little world of hers where she felt Jack had her in his heart and, it something that she wouldn't have seen if she hadn't been playing once again with her little buddies in the port. She saw Jack's bike parked and hidden in the back of the Tell All Tavern – Lola's place.

It was getting dark outside so Molly could see well inside. She went up to the window and the rats followed as she peeked and they were all gazing at this scene in a row. Inside and she could see he was working her. Lola was a rich, rude girl who ran her father's tavern with an iron fist. Her chief attraction other than her height and her long thick curls was that she was cold as an Icelandic breaze. But Jack had broken her – probably many years ago - and he followed her around the bar, nibbling on her ear and she laughingly pushed him away as she waited on the loyal gang of customers round the bar.

What was he dabbling with Lola for? Even worse, Lola's big mean boyfriend was Steele, who'd just about knock anybody head off who messed with his girl. And then of course there was Penny!

She glanced around the corner, Steeles' Red Peterbilt was gone, he probably was be gone for weeks on the long runs he did to the East Coast.

Jack now was serving customers drinks, too and then pouring them for himself! And as Molly and the Rats watched he became drunker and drunker and was swaying ridiculously over and trying to grope Lola again who laughed as she pushed him off saying

"Jack! You drunk!"

Suddenly he split and barged out the door and ran smack into Molly. And swayed over to her and kissed her again!

Lolly screemed "Stop it, Jack! Stooooooooooop!"

Standing there Molly's face burned in indignant shame and Jack tripped on a bush and fell down and lay there passed out in the grass at her feet.

Ah! The shame and disgust, the indignity of it all! This had happened before too! Now she saw it was NOT folly to hide as a boy – for she was hiding from this! Mom was wrong, really dang Wrong!! And yet - she was right, too!

She looked down! They must hide him before the cops or the Shore Patrol come and get him – or even Steele.

Not telling Lola a thing, Molly shook him awake

"Hey Amanda." He was saying looking right at her. "Whatcha doin' here, gurl?"

And she and the Rats walked him over to Keiloni's two doors down, and got him up in a room there, where he soundlessly fell on the bed and passed out on his face again. Molly dug in his warm back pocket of his jeans for his wallet and paid Keiloni.

"You're not going to stay?" K. teased her at the threshold of the doorway. All the rats just laughed except Lolly.

"No way!" she blushed violently.

"I know you *loooo-ve* him!" she taunted. "Now that you're a gurl!" and the Rats giggled.

"Quiet! He'll hear!!" She blushed crimson.

"Oh shush, they all love him and he well knows it!"

She looked upon him laying there face buried in the bed, thinking of the long lost Amanda, *they all love him because he's so fallen…*

And, cussing herself all the while, she got Keiloni's teenage son Tig, to drive Jack's bike into her back alley.

"I'll be back in time to wake him for duty!"

I'm the one who's the one in 'The Nile!!'

Prodigal Father

"Well, Mol, we're going to meet a real legend in a few days." Tim said suddenly one morning to his wife and step daughter, from behind the paper, fortified with black coffee and his wife's good cooking.

"Whose that?"

He layed down the paper with drama."*Captain Henry* McCracken."

"Wow!" Flo breathed out. "Finally!"

"Jack's father." Molly uttered.

"Yes."

"…"

"Captain *Henry* Jack McCracken – my Uncle Henry."

"He's coming to town for the wedding?" Molly asked.

"How is it I've never met him before?" Flo asked blatantly with her spatula in one hand, the other on her hip.

"Well, he's finally just retired from the North Atlantic Trades. He wanted to stay in the Navy Lodge, but Flo I think we should invite him to stay over here with us, in the spare room."

Flo said a bit alarmed. "Okay, but can I hire a cleaning service first?"

"Yes, that's a good idea. Let's all police up ourselves real well around Uncle Henry, you too, Mol, and treat him like you would a high ranking officer – which he is – he's a chief mate which is the same thing as a captain in the Navy."

"Of course."

"Jack's going to pick us up and take us all to the airport together. Uncle Henry's flight is on Friday at 6:32PM, Pan Am flight 1102."

"It'll be just in time to see him before I have to go." He reminded them that their Captain of their ship was going away for a long cruise, a long time away. And Molly had learned to become full of prayers, for it all loomed so dastardly over her! Her throat began to ache. She must be getting sick, she thought.

Captain Henry

Jack swooped by in the Chamberlains caravan, Penny planted up front. "Cupcake, let Tim sit up front, will you girl." So Molly had to sit by Penny and Flo sat on her other side, who cross-talked her daughter to Penny

"Gip. Gip. Gip." Like hens, they clucked happily over Molly, gossiping to their delight. But, Penny's keen eyes for social detail surmised that Flo wished her daughter to be like her, but Molly didn't seem to be aware of her mother's favoritism, for, Penny finally noted, her eyes were riveted up front to Jack ignoring all the fuss of her mother. Penny could

see why the kid was so talented with her man – she watched over him like a hawk. And if she hadn't been so apprehensive about this girl she would have never noticed the subtext going on here. And when Penny saw this, she did note something extraordinary about Jack – he was exceedingly nervous to meet his own father and was working doubly hard to conceal it.

Few things ever got by Flo, though whose chief delight was to tease Jack "Step on it, Jack, you're driving like an old man."

"Ha. Ha." He said. "It's cuz I got such a heavy load – in the back."

"Now, who's talking heavy, you got a few pounds on you now Jack. I might have to let out that tux of yours."

"Get in the left lane." Tim said.

"Aye, Aye, chief!" he snapped, without a touch of humor.

"Now go left at Harborside."

"Damn it. Give me another cigarette Tim."

He lit one and handed to Jack and Penny tried her hand at teasing "Jack, Jack – the smoke stack." Fanning herself. But Molly saw his eyes locked onto the back seat with annoyance. And she saw him again in her head, with Lola.

"Okay, I'm letting you all off here."

"I'll go with you Jack." Said Penny.

"No."

"But…"

Flo grabbed Penny's arms.

He parked a long way off and Penny watched him moodily walked towards them.

"Well, he's nervous." Flo told Penny by the valet watching his walk.

"Why?" Penny asked for Jack wouldn't tell her much.

"They've always been kind of tense with each other.

Jack came back up, unsmiling and sat far away from his family in the terminal. Finally the jet landed and tim and jack got up to the window glancing at each other.

"Here goes nothing."

Tim looked him over. "He's always been kind of rough on you."

"Yeah. I haven't seen him in ten years, when Eric graduated from Medical school." As he waited at the glass, looking out upon the runway, he thought about the fight at the graduation party – again, about his drinking and he had told his father he never wanted to see him again. Foolish words, really, but he was so tired of being compared to Eric, The Perfect - his older brother: "See Jack, look what you could be doing with your life, but instead you're just drinking it away, as usual."

The closer the time came for his father to come, the more brutal Jack became with himself and finally it dawned on him why he had *really* called up his old man that day after drinking a six pack on Penny's yacht – after years of silence, he realized he was showing off to his father his *new* old man, the gracious and debonair, Robert Chamberlain, Penny's cool yacht owning father who seemed to like him just swell! It was a form of vengeance. But now it seemed ill conceived, as seemed everything he did short of the orphans and the Navy. The kids were the one jewel in his life and he wanted another brew to not think anymore, anymore.

"Attention: Arriving Pan American Airlines Flight 1042 from Boston at gate 16…" and he literally shook in his shoes.

They waited and waited and finally the long train of passengers filed off as the family searched for a familiar face. At long last Molly was to see what kind of man had created a Jack McCracken and at last came a very tall, very dignified man with short cropped grey hair, around sixty years old, impeccably dressed and carrying a fine leather briefcase.

He took one step into the lobby and scanned the room where a few people were smiling eagerly at him.

And there stood his son - taller than her had remembered, incredibly he still looked just like his mother.

They met face to face like foes captain on a scrimmage line and a second of cold surmise passed and his son stuck out a nervous, timid hand. Henry put down his briefcase and pushed it away suddenly and grabbed Jack in a big bear hug.

His son had laughed the same laugh he had as a kid when he had bowled him over in play wrestling matches. It was a long time coming to hear that laugh again which was like sweet music to Henry McCracken. And he hugged him long and hard. Behind Jack's back he swallowed and squeezed his eyes tight.

Jack, deeply red in the face and shaking introduced everyone. Henry guessed "Tim!" he hadn't seen his brother's kid since Tim was a teenager. Tim looked just like a tough navy chief – someone who things always went right for because he was so squared away. And Flo – a darling, she too was as he thought: cute, funny energetic with a big warm heart. His future daughter in Law he said "Wow, what a beaute! How did you ever land this one, Jack?" And little Molly a little girl just about grown up "This must be your girl Tim."

"Well, I'm Flo's daughter." she corrected.

Jack drove them slowly back and Henry amused the entire van with little details of his trip. They saw where Jack got his legs from for he barely fit in the van.

They made him at home at soon they were visiting the rest of the day in the living room. The lush atmosphere gave an aura

of masculinity as three sat there like three kings – McCrackens all, each magnificent in his own purely male way, Penny noted. and later the men played pool deep into the night while the girls Flo and Penny sucked down beers and gossiped and molly was nowhere to be found. They all stayed up so late that Penny fell asleep on the living room couch and Flo passed out on the floor by the divan.

In the next days they took Henry to the main attractions of San Diego like the Hotel Del Coronado and Balboa park and later the three were booking a boat for a deep-sea fishing trip before tim had to go and Jack squeezed this all in with work.

Strutting in jubilantly, a few days later he just smiled and Flo told him:

"You know Jack, I've never seen you so happy."

"I know! You know there's miracles afterall!"

He grabbed Molly from behind and tickled her on her waist, who giggled and wildly try to get away.

He let her go and said "and guess what else? Dad is going to buy a small house or condo – to be near us!"

"No kiddin'."

"No, Ma'am. I feel like I finally have my family back!"

"What do you know, Jack." She said touching his arm. "What do you know!"

Soon Jack and Henry were on the links, and Jack mentioned Robert Chamberlain had wanted to go sailing with all three. It's funny, Jack thought, he'd put Robert out of his mind some now.

He was getting so comfortable with Henry – Dad - these days, but these were days also of intense pressure at work, for the Captain of his ship had his re-enlistment papers before him and Jack was really sweating it out in suspense.

[also say this earlier in story to build suspense]

They were playing pool and the comfort and ease which he now had with his father it slipped out "I hope the skipper sign my papers this week."

"You look worried about them."

"Yes, Dad." He admitted. "I've had some trouble in the past and well, they're looking to can anyone these days - for anything." Jack took a deep pull on the bottle. "Reductions in Forces. They want to decommission the fleet of two hundred ships and my rate is a seagoing rate as there ever is one!" He paused and gulped and shamelessly gave his father his resume: "But I have a recruiters badge, five letters of commendation, the Naval Humanitarian Ribbon [ribbon for being wounded] and ten hard years out to sea.. It should go good for me for another hitch…"

he was saying remembering vividly Chief Belt relieving him of duty after another all-nighter with Penny and the cheerleaders.

"Jack?" Henry asked carefully, "I don't judge you, but I just want to know – is this trouble in your past alcohol related?"

Jack nodded slowly.

"I thought so." Said Henry and took a shot.

Jack looked down, and Henry making several shots in a row while he was saying "Penny said something about her father might have a position for you."

"Nothing to do with ships." Jack said as if he had a lemon in his mouth. "It'd be something corporate, you know, like Marketing or Sales. "

"You don't seem to happy about it."

"Well, I like Robert a whole bunch – you'll see when you meet him, but, well, they party a lot and well business isn't my cup of tea really…" He couldn't spit out the words to his father that he'd been tossing around for days in his head *He'd be given a nothing job, what could he do, the sea was his only skill. He'd be bumming off of them!!'Well, I'd be a rich drunken bum of a son-in-law and I'll be drunk the rest of my life.*

God, he just had to stay in, for it was his whole life, he had no net beneath him. If he lost it, he'd loose everything he had and was.

Daliance Dance

A month later found Molly – coiled up on the forbidden couch since Mama wasn't at home with a book *Two Years before the Mast of another sailor come to San Diego from Boston by way of Cape Horn over a hundred and fifty years before.*

Henry McCracken had rented a condo on the Silver Strand near Imperial Beach and things had calmed down in their house. As she read the classic she was considering the seagoing lessons within the story. Things now felt right, if she could not have Jack in her life as he always had been, well then she could have what he had, what she had desperately envied. So Tim had quietly taken her to the recruiting station and she was scheduled for a physical at MEPS the next week. All seemed right, this was the right thing to do, to get away!

She had been thinking over these thoughts for days now, when she heard the purr of Jack's bike pulling up. This was unusual, for neither of her folks were home yet, but she was happy to see him, for once she had made *The Big Decision*, she had indeed stepped up to his level – or one day she would be there. It was time to fix what was wrong in her life. She would greet him, not as a wanna-be little girl-daughter but as an equal – a sailor too! And suddenly she felt great about it – at peace. Soon he'd be married, or with Lola, or whatever! And soon she'd be sweep up in the Navy, her once and formidable love - as he had, as her father had, as Tim had, and as she had always dreamed…

He came in still in his leathers and helmet and she got up from the couch to greet him, she was smiling. His eyes sharpened on her through the visor, though, obviously he was mad and she could and would deal with him.

He unbuckled the helmet without taking his eyes off hers "I'm damn ticked at you."

"You heard, then?"

"Yes." He set down the helmet down on the kitchen table between the two and put fingers through his hair to smooth it. "Your Daddy just told me down at the Navy Credit Union."

The scene rolled before him involuntarily – of his cousin's large hazel eyes' apprasing him while he told him in line at the credit union. And a shock – on the Richter scale - went through him, standing there, trying desparately to hide this unknown feeling - whatever it was that was striking him hard in the stomach. "I'm going to talk to that young lady right now."

And he did his transaction and left, his cousin watching him swiftly leave. He could never ever hide anything from Tim. Tim felt an unease about all this, and he better get home immediately to figure it all out.

And Jack got the shakes a little bit on his way home, so he swiftly downed two beers at the back of Jose's Carneceria on Island and through the bottles in the dumpster before he hit the house.

He still got there first in his motorcycle he could weave in and out of traffic, of course, and now she stood before him, smiling and it was dazzling. She had a cocky and confident streak in her afterall- she'd make a good sailor he thought, and he tripped a little over the threshold of the door, damnit.

"Yes, Jack."

"Did I not spend a half a day at the college with you!"

"Yes."

"So, I was just wasting my time and you had your mind made up already."

She laughed a little vividly remembering him kissing Lola on the neck. "No, Jack, actually, that's the day that cinched it for me. I found these job too boring - as did you."

"I don't see why you have to have excitement – you're a girl and you don't need…"

"You're wrong! I do need it." Hand of hips, she fled to the kitchen and was gonna monkey up an omelette, like Mom, she thought.

"This is unbelievable!"

"How so Jack? Seafaring is in my blood." She smiled and poured him a cup of coffee as she talked, walking around the counter. She felt such a weight off her in the matter that she bounced around the counter, whistling a little and pouring herself a mug, she looked up and realizing his greens were locked sharply on her over the brim of his mug.

He was amazed, as her watched her like a bird of prey - she was vastly more together than her real father had ever been and this was stunning to see her confidence, her poise, her feminine swagger as she spoke to him the the kitchen and performed minor little chores.

"Want an omelette, Jack?"

"No!" he snapped.

"Look, Jack, my Dad was in the Navy, my stepfather is and so are you. It's all I know. It's mama's milk to me."

"I'm not believing any of these words." He set the cup down loud.

She was smiling a great sailor's smile – bourne of the Westpac typhoon season and free as an albatross soar. "Oh, I'm in love with the vast open ocean." She said with her head leaning back and laughed at her own lost world of the vapors of seamist, where reality was lost over the horizons and dreams were culled in the lullaby of seawaves, oh - by and by! She was

so Jacklike in this versage that she laughed at herself richly, stretching her arms out across the kitchen and stretching as she did. She was richly becoming like him – in his potions for adoration! A Hah! He had raised her to be like him and not the poor, lost Tommy! And, he had succeeded quite well! She had transcended her real father!

"They'll make you a yeoman and you'll be in some land-locked command somewhere in Illinois like the Cornfield Navy at 'Great Mistakes'!" he tripped her.

"Naw, I'm going to pick some seafaring rate – I was thinking of QM actually, now that you mention it…" She grinned at him. Déjà vu! He remembered Tommy saying the very same damn thing! The curse was circling back upon him, and he grabbed a brew from his cousin's stash.

"Dang!" he turned his back on her, emptying it, looking over the veranda to the ocean beyond the bay. His hands on his hips. "So your following my example!" he wanted another beer, but he didn't dare bum one another from his cousin – who was griping at him more and more these days – one more worry to wash on down whatever was going on?

"I rather think so, Jack. I like what kind of duty you've had. I don't know yet. Or maybe do something more technical, like Tim. I'm still ironing this part out."

" I never thought all those stories I told would lead you this way, that…"

"…that they would get written upon my heart so well. I am like a daughter to you and I drunk them in like rum -- or like a San Miguel."

He turned and looked at her as if he'd never seen her before. "Since when have you started drinking?" he put his hand through his hair – "I'll surely get blamed for it if you started drinking too!

"I haven't drank, but perhaps I should." She said raising her eyebrows in 'Touchez' and expert fencer would, when they'd touched the heart and won! You are my foe, Jack, a Lola-Lover! And she put her hands on her hips and laughed at him then and there! Not some mythic seaman anymore, he was just a drunken sailor, afterall!

"I've known you too long, *little-girl*, to hear you talk like that!"

"Well, I've grown up, Jack." She laughed and delightedly taunted him: "Uncle Ja-yack!"

"I see." He gulped, appraising her looking her up and down. She was right. She was all grown up as if he hadn't noticed. She had tight shirt and shorts on and he gulped and she snickered at him as she saw his eyes fall all over her. She had Bonnie's

wisdom but sharpness of… of well, his own! And he was astounded at what he suddenly felt standing there before him.

"Lola my butt! she thought." As she saw him look at her like that. "and Penny my Ass!" she cursed to herself, for once.

Suddenly she was hot! Where had time gone! She was only his little girl only just yesterday he thought! And there she stood laughing at him! And he had rocked in his own shoes!

"I really don't get why you're so upset about all this." She smiled so radiantly and turned to, to wipe the counter with the rag.

He didn't get it either! He was groping in the dark, lost, and he must be feeling something. It was terrible to be lost like this, not knowing his own mind with a pending wedding…he wanted to jump on his bike and ride off and run away from these feelings. He peeped over at her…she was smiling a bit like Bon always did – a knowing wise smile as if she was reading the very thoughts at the back of his head!

"Damn!" he said mad at himself for thinking like this, for feeling like this, for his cousin's girl! His best friend's daughter! How would Tim take this! Too young – eighteen! He was thirty-two and engaged! She was family too and all he needed now was for his cousin to see them alone together arguing! And Tim was on his way back from base after the credit union. But, he had to stop this madness even if he was messed up.

"Let's go for a ride." He said suddenly as if he didn't will these words.

"Where to?"

"Just put on some jeans and a jacket, will you?"

"Okay."

"Chop! Chop!"

"Okay!"

A few minutes passed, while he paced in the kitchen and paced back and forth, hoping the ride would clear his head out. She came out and seemed oblivious to the storm in side his head. And he jumped on the seat and fired up the bike and as soon she climbed on he was back on the handle spinning out of the driveway and down the street..

He sped onto the freeway for a few miles northward on the 5 towards Miramar to the Pacific Coast Highway and onto a rolling coastline route, where the turns calmed him as he lay the bike into the curves. He was at home here, with her behind him - as she always had been. Though she'd been too young, he felt he just couldn't let her get away! He hadn't known all these terrible feelings would arise out! He had to clear up his life some – about Penny, about his terrible mess of a career. But above all he could think about was he didn't want Molly to go away – not to the Navy of all things!

He found a spot of land wide enough to park the bike on, that overlooked the ocean. The day was clear, the water the color of azur set off by the contrasting blazing golden cliffs and besides him was a girl he knew so well, but one who could still make him shake.

He found a sandstone boulder to sit by above all this and she sat besides him.

He looked out as he spoke. "Look, I just don't want you to go away." After he spoke the truth, he felt huge relief.

"Why, Jack?"

He looked down, he was scared again – Why? Who knows! and so he added ante to it – well, a kind of lie, really, to confuse the real issue at hand – he was scared for once. "I don't want to loose you to them."

"To who?"

"To other sailors."

"Jack it's a career choice, not a…"

"You think I was born yesterday, Mol, they're going to eat you alive and I won't be around to protect you!"

And the infectuous WestPac fever she thought. And She was so glad to have a mom like her own.

"You're too young to protect yourself from them."

And he was right, for he himself had kissed her twice – had he even remembered that he had!? Or, had the drink taken that too!

But he grabbed her hand suddenly, kissed her hand and peeped over, "I care for you Mol." There, unwillingly, he'd said it at last! There had been many girls before, but he had said it for once… he must be going crazy. He felt his life was sliding on down to the … gutters.

She said nothing and gulls gawking cries taunted him as he awaited answer.

"What do you mean?" she said at last perplexed.

"Are you mad at me Mol?"

"You're getting married, Jack." And he was seeing Lola as well!!

"I'm messed up right now, Mol, I'm not happy with her. I've got to change some things around, I think. I guess now that Dad's back, I'm changing some things…"

He squeezed her shoulders and she dared: "Jack, I'm not some port girl you know." And I'm not Lola!

"I know – you're a little lady now." He said softly.

"Right now all I know is that I just don't want you to go away, girl. And I can't promise you anything either!

She nodded. And he breathed out a sigh of relief she'd always been his girl! He told her some jokes and she laughed as

usual but she looked faraway and scared. This was all too new to her and she didn't know what to say or do or even feel.

"So, no more of the Navy talk, okay?" he said.

She nodded.

"You promise this time."

"But, Jack you yourself offered no promises…"

"Right. I know, Mol, cuz I'm really tired of breaking little hearts…"

She looked at him – he was uncharacteristing biting his nails. He was starting to worry about Tim, now."Well, let's go back before anyone finds out."

"Another secret?" she asked looking up to him, scared.

"No luv, it's just less pressure, okay?"

"Okay." She turned towards the bike and he grabbed her hand and gently pulled her forwards to him.

"Come here, little girl!" He said smiling delighted and relaxed. And he pulled her up on the cliffs and kissed her lightly there and he turned her around holding her from behind and whispered in her ear. He was pointing to the ocean where "one can sometimes see the flukes of grey whales migrating to the gulf of Baja…"

Troubling brimstone and lightening fired up and down her back - despite herself - now she knew she was grown up!! Now she knew what it was to want a man – she had so ignored it in her Jack, for he always seemed to belong to someone – or something - else. This momentuous moment was cast in a aura of unreality, was it really happening?

"Ah… what I've seen at sea, girl…" He was saying in her delirium from round behind her, from deep inside of her, he wrapped his arms all around her and was leaning to whisper in her ear: "From waterspouts and whales' tails to swimcall in the Indian Ocean and the sea glowing with green plankton at night." He kissed her earlobe. He smelled of beer.

Yet,Boy, did he know how to work her! The sun was sinking over the horizon onwards to the WestPac and he whispered "I've seen Icebergs and the Northern Lights in the North Pacific, and heard the shots of the big guns of the Battleship New Jersey shooting overhead."

What a life; what a life he'd had, she began to want it as she had wanted him. "I've been to ports-of-call all around the Pacific rim and seen the eruption of Mount Pinatubo near Clark. I've seen carrier landings at sunrise off the Persian Gulf and green water on top of the flightdeck." He kissed her neck. "If I don't tell anyone these memories may be lost forever."

"Like you, Jack – Like you."

He shook his head 'No' and then somehow they now were riding back down the twisted road, she clung to him in the

winding curves the wind stinging tears in her eyes, and as many before her, and despite herself, *oh God, how she loved him so*!

Too swiftly they were home again and dreams and littlegirl feelings were sweeping her soul like a tsunami and he was putting up the kickstand by the opened garage

"Maybe I shouldn't have done that Moll…" he was already regretting! "You're too young, you're family…"

And she stood before him dumbstruck.

Then Tim came out, very alert and was already racking up balls. "We went for a ride and I had a talk with Molly about this Navy thing – and I changed her mind." Molly was scrambling up the stairs but she did catch the surprise on her stepfather's face.

"How did you do that?" he snapped.

"Oh that's easy, I just told her about Typhoon Guillermo." Jack lied. Jack was normal, as if nothing had so momentuous had happened. But Tim was not one to be easily fooled and Molly fled upstairs avoiding his sharp eyes.

She pondered these bewilderments upstairs on the bed with her stuffed animals, as if she were still just but a girl.

What Daddies Did

Saturday came about - Molly was at her channel-changing worse, for Mama was not at home to knock her from laying luxuriantly about on the couch and her stepfather was making love to the Porsche downstairs, polishing a tuning up the little beast hour after hour.

She went to the front lawn to fish the TV guide out of the *Union Tribune* - to increase her channel-changing pleasure – and dilute the fiery things of yesterdays of kisses of sailors who would be only part-time lovers. And Tim stood up from his polishing and surmised her.

"Molly."

"Yes, Tim."

"What's going on between you and Jack?"

She jumped and fumbled the *Tribune* to the grass, with the new acrylic nails Bonnie'd pasted on her. Tim smiled at this and she blushed and stammered. "I – I don't know." Only to Bonnie had she so confided at the salon.

He folded his rag and came forward to her saying, "Now, Molly, don't worry, I'm not going to say a word to your mom. I know how your mother can be about things with you. It's just between us, Moll, I promise."

She nodded.

"So tell me Mol, what's going on?" his sharp Chief's eyes Radar locked onto her and she blurted out:

"He kissed me."

"HE DID WHAT! Damn! He lied to me!" Tim said throwing the rag down on the lawn and storming around the Porsche in disgust. "I hate drunks! And I hate Liars! Even if they are my own family!"

"Please don't tell him I told you that. Please!" she went around to the back and grabbed his forearm imploring him, totally regretting telling him anything. "Now I'm really embarrassed!"

"I want to protect you from that kind, Molly!"

He walked around the car again, pacing. "…from Sailors." He said with irony - being one himself. And he lit a cigarette and appraised her through the smoke from the other side of the sportscar, for he had seen many girls fall under Jack over the decades.

"Um, does Mama know anything?" she said breathless.

"No, I don't believe so." He puffed.

"Gosh…" she was amazed. "Mama usually never misses anything about me and my love life – or lack of one."

"She's all wrapped up into that girl, about this wedding, you'd think Penny is her frickin' daughter." He snapped - his wife could be so catty and petty at times towards Molly, but Molly didn't seem too put out about this and he looked at her again across the car, with new acertation, and he was rather pleased to see Molly's nonchalance; she was rather like him afterall.

And Molly grabbed a cloth and began to help him buff the wax and this simple gesture of hers touched his heart, this was his only kid, really, for, none of his sons had anything to do with him lately, not even calling on his birthday or Christmas, thanks to the continuous poisening of their mother and stepfather; he felt keenly protective of her suddenly.

"So, let me tell you something, Molly."

"What?"

"Jack is my cousin, though he's more like a brother to me – and I love him – but Molly you must already know this about Jack, but, well – He's never been able to stay with a girl for very long."

It was true as a compass pointing north, and she'd well known it, and had even lived through it for decades now; however it was a statement from Tim that had an impact like on the shore like an EastPac breakers, that roared in their fury and pounding on the Californian shorelines like clenched fists pounding on a bar. With Jack were always stormy seas and trouble and Molly had grown up to this. Yet, like every new breaker, it still took her by surprise at its fury, at its undeliverable tantalizement of its open ocean roar.

He was like a drink, but the intoxication wasn't leaving her, though she knew it was not real!

"He's still seeing Lola." She unloaded at last.

He sighed, his anger spent, now buffing the Porsche that was his - Jack without officially telling him so, had basically given him the beast - for he couldn't ever use it, being ever out to sea. He had always been so generous to him and it killed the anger he felt suddenly towards Jack.

"Don't tell him I told you that."

"No, I just don't want to see you hurt by someone whose so close to us all." He resumed buffing. He was already feeling bad about it – but he just had to, had to watch over his stepdaughter. It was his duty. "Jack is…" and he shook his head slowly, he couldn't put it into words, but the headshake said it all. He was an unbelievable treasure to a woman; he was too good to be true.

And alas he wasn't.

And she was glad she'd chose the Navy, for only the deepened black sea could beckoned her as strong as her lifelong love of Jack.

The Pictures

Molly chores had always been the landscaper of the house – she did all of the outside work because Tim was way to busy to and because she was excellent at it. Flowers popped out everywhere, the sidewalked she lined in tuft grass, and it had always set her Mama off right to come home to that. For that it was worth the time and effort to see Mama pleased about one thing girlish she could do just right: make something beautiful other than just words.

She was watering the lawn, thinking about Tim and Bonnie leaving, while Jack was getting married and she was sad already, when Jack pulled up in his motorcycle. She shut off the water as he kicked up his bikestand and tore off his helmet. Her parents were not home just yet and again her heart was rocking about inside her chest as he walked up the drive.

"Oh, hi Mol, you're just the one I came to see." He said.

"Me?" she said humbly and just a little thrown off guard - *just me?*

"Yeah, girl. I have something for you."

He dug into his leather coat pocket and pulled out a little envelope that had her name handwritten in black ink upon it.

"Here girl." He handed it to her.

She opened it and there he was, her daddy, in a stack of pictures from DJ, and she tore through them as the memories of him coming back to her rich and deep as if they'd never been lost before!

He was there in Subic Bay with DJ smiling in one, another official shot in uniform getting a ribbon and shaking hands with his captain, another with Jack and DJ in Olangapo.

"DJ did a good job with these. He copied some right out of his cruise book for you too."

"I'm going to have to send him a thank you letter!" she said, deeply touched and on the verge of weeping.

"That would be neat Mol. I can get it to him, if you like."

And of course the last one was with her Daddy holding her before the gangway of the *Connie* in her yellow dress, his mustache against her cheeks. She had remembered this well "Little Princess" he was calling her right then and she burst out into grief.

"Awwh! Don't cry about it Mol." He said deeply shaken. "I didn't think you'd *cry*…"

"Jack, what had happened to him?"

"A lot." He sighed.

"Tim's going away soon." She sobbed "And Bon, too."

"I know." He said and thought "and I'm going away too." He said telling her that he indeed knew of her pain. He was so fair in that way. She loved him.

She nodded "I'm loosing my Daddy again."

"Awwh… Mol, Tim will be coming back again." He said, leaning down to her.

She nodded still shaking. "Why did my Daddy die?"

"I didn't think I'd upset you so much." He said completely bewildered.

"I thought it'd make you happy, Mol." He said baffled and deeply shaken.

"Sure, Jack it does." She wiped her eyes. "Guess I've never cried for him before that's all – I was too young."

"Right, Mol. You know, I still miss him too, girl."

She looked up to him and he looked at the ground.

"Yeah, not hardly a day goes by, that I don't think of him, Molly." In rough voice he told the blades of grass underfoot.

"Really? Why?"

"Tommy Malloy - he was my best friend." He swallowed hard. She gulped having never talked of this before, but she could smell the smell of alcohol on his breath; gosh; it was always there these days. He had driven over here like that. She looked at him, he swayed a listed a little to the left.

He patted his chest pocket where an envelope was. "Got me a set too, Mol."

She took in a breath, he was not long dead in Jack's mind as well – as deluged as it was.

"Yeah, he was my best friend – and I let him down bigtime."

And he hugged her long standing there on the lawn, patting the top of her hair remembering their Tommy together – and, as if in a spell, she lifted her mouth up to his and tasted the salt of her own teardrops upon his lips.

But Tim drove up to them in the Porsche swiftly, jumping out saying:

"What in the hell is going on here!!?"

"Nothing Tim!" Jack said jumpng back in shock.

"Nothing my ass!"

"No, really…" he pulled out the packet of pictures to explain, but it was too late and too many lies past and Tim slapped them to the ground.

"No Tim!" Molly assured him. "It was all my doing…It was I."

But he snapped at her "Get in the house Molly, or you're gonna see something you don't like!" Tim's hand clinched into a fist.

"But Tim!!!"

"If you ever lay a hand on her again, Jack, you're going to have to deal with me!"

"Tim I assure you…"

"Look Molly is family and you will leave her alone!"

"The pictures, I was just giving her the pictures…"

"It's not enough to have your fiancé and Lola and Rosy and at least two other Philipina girls, you have to pick on our own Molly as well!"

Jack stood there his mouth open in deep shock, not knowing anyone knew about them all, his secret girl cache.

"So get the hell out of here!"

And Jack swiftly turned to get on his bike, leaving the pictures at Molly's feet and she grabbed them weeping at the pictures and memories lost to Jack now of the ancient lost unbegotten Tommy, as he roared away. He was dying to her once again!

"Molly…" Tim tried to comfort her touching her shoulder. "Oh God, You love him too, don't you?"

She nodded while weaping into her hands.

"God, why do they always love him?" He questioned looking up to the sky. He'd lived with this phenomenon Jack had many decades now and he received the force of the full extent of his envy!

He had never understood the hold he had over them and their pretty little hearts. It had always baffled him, even way back when Jack had come to live with his family as a kid in Pascagoula, Mississippi, when his Aunt Virginia was in jail for her third DUI and his Uncle Henry was far out to sea. Even back then as a kid he had all the young girl's in the neighborhood hearts in tow.

Molly was shaking and he held her too. "Look, Jack's not for you, Mol, he's too much a drunk. He's not for you… not for you… not for you… not for you… not for you…" and the more Tim said that the more she wanted Jack.

She wondered why it had to always be so hard, this life. It was so much, so much toil upon the heart, ever.

Unterfallen

They were sitting in the mall in the foodcourt. He was really upset – he'd had a fight with his cousin and he was pretty down and out. He kept telling her he thought he'd lost his family, but wouldn't go into details.

Malls always had lots of young kids, he was really worried about the orphanage for some agonizing unknown reason, they were all around him.

"I've got the shakes, I need a beer."

"But you've got duty later."

"I'll have just one." He said, but he drank three straight down and he held up a hand, the shaking had stopped, but now his breath stank. Man, he needed to cut back some!

She tried to comfort him. "Let's go to a Padres game at Petco Park… let's go to the yacht…" but no, he did not want any of these things. They went into a department store, where she pulled out her plastic and was buying him a nice shirt. Time was getting late, he looked at his wrist and a knife went through his stomach!

"Penny! Damn it My watch stopped!"

"What?"

"Drop everything, you got to take me back to my ship right frickin now!"

"But Jack I'm almost checked out."

"If you care one rats butt about me drop all that shit right now and take me!! Run!!" and she found herself clanking hard in her heals down the mall after Jack.

She'd never seen him so frightened "Oh my God! I'm not going to make it!" they hit every traffic imaginable, though it was Saturday.

And they reached the ship at exactly a quarter to the hour – he'd simply throw on his uniform, and basically he'd pulled off a miracle once again.

However when he reached the bridge the first class he was relieving stood stiff and looked aggravated with him. "Chief wants to see your ass McCracken." And his stomach lurched, he tried to calm his nerves as he walked to the chief's compartment. He had made it on time – sort of, he was on the boat by watch time.

But when he came Chief Belt was typing something and took it off the machine – it was a DD 214 and he wordlessly handed to Jack without flinching.

"You know what this is Jack."

"Why Chief! I made my watch on time!"

"No you were five minutes UA."

"Chief, my watch stopped!"

"It doesn't matter, Jack, the Captain wasn't going to sign your reenlistment papers anyway, Jack."

"For just five minutes, Chief!"

"No, Jack." He tried to be kind to the guy who was facing the end of his career."It was all the Article 15s and Captain's Masts in the past."

"A decade ago!! I was a kid back then chief!"

"Well, there are guys with less trouble being booted Jack – it's just Reduction in Forces."

"But I've been burnt head to toe, chief!"

"I know that Jack. And that's why I *did* try to help you."

"I smell alcohol on your breath, Jack."

He stood there staring at the chief who'd just murdered his career - all fourteen years of it!! All for fourteen for nothing!!

"Sit down Jack, let me talk to you." And he tried to tell him of the out-processing he'd go through, but Jack fell back in the chair and wasn't listening his head was against the bulkhead, uncharistically without bearing or respect.

All he could think of was the drink and that he had no where else to go now, but the street. Not even Tim's house would welcomed him anymore!! He had not a care in the world now! Not a lick! And when you're like that you can do anything you want.

"You've got to see the Captain tomorrow morning."

He said nothing, his eyes rooted on a picture of the *Kitty Hawk* behind the chief. He was remembering the Sampaugita Club Night Fight vividly when he was on that ship.

"Try not to drink too much tonight, Jack." Chief said swallowing heavily.

"Oh, there'll be no stopping me now, Chief."

"I was afraid you would say that, Jack. Where's Rick?"

"I don't know."

"Can you get to your cousin's house tonight Jack?"

"What's it to you, *Eddy*?"

"I'm worried about you Jack. You seem like you want to punish yourself…"

"No. What I'd like to do is kick your ass, Eddy." He said head still back, doomed and without a care in the world – without a care in the world and you can do anything – anything you want. There was a kind of morbid exhileration in that feeling.

"I guess I can understand that…"

The door opened and it was the Captain of the ship and Jack sprang to his feet – man to man for the first time in his career with his commanding officer and was glaring at the guy nose to nose, Jack twitched and the douche-bag actually

flinched, which gave Jack no small measure of morbid satisfaction and he then smiled most wickedly right into the skipper's eyes.

Chief jumped up "Jack! You will at-ease around the CO!! Jack!! Back off Jack!!" but Jack turned sharply and swept past the CO and slammed the hatch behind him.

Chief dove for his rolodex while the captain still stood there, furious, and he dialed the quarterdeck of the USS Spruance for the chief who was Jack's cousin, while the CO fumed in front of his desk, demanding action.

As he went towards his rack, he saw that Penny's TransAm still in the lot. She was still re-doing her makeup. And as he walked down the gangway words, like circling gulls flew around and squawked in his head: '*Without a care in the world and you can do anything, anything you want.*'

"Forget about us Penny. I'm gone." And so he'd offload her!

"What? Oh, no Jack." She said popping out of the car clanking her heals after him to the ship.

"Geez, do you mind not making a scene?" he said over his shoulders.

"Jack, what's going on? What just happened up there?"

"I just lost my job."

"As LPO?"

He turned viciously to face her. "No, Penny, I just lost my career - the Navy! And all my family!"

"Lost the Navy?" her heart wrenched for him. "Over that?!"

"Yes, Penny, I lost my career over that!"

"What!" she began crying. "No!"

"Yes, so look, we're finished, Okay! I'm a drunken bum and I got nowhere to go now!"

"Let me help you Jack."

"No way!"

"Why, Jack, oh, why!" she cried, putting her hands onto his.

He jerked his arm away "Leave me alone, now!" and he went up the gangway leaving her there sobbing. He went to his rack without a glance sidewards Chief Belt saw all this and went looking for Petty Officer Kucera's chief's number and then he went down the gangway to the pier to comfort the weeping girl still standing there.

But Jack was in his civies and gone into town.

Jack had many friends like Rick that were devoted to him, but it was to the Waterline Tavern he went to find Denny who, too, had fallen from the sea.

He ordered a rum in coke, from Cat not even sitting down to the bar yet. And he had it half way down when he noticed no one was playing the piano.

"Hey, Cat, where's Denny?"

She stopped and came up close to him at the bar.

"Don't you know Jack?"

"Know what?"

"Denny's ill. You haven't been in, in a while have you?"

"What's wrong with him?

"He's got cirrossis of the liver, Jack. He's dying."

The world stopped! He was at the AA meeting, Jack remembered telling everyone he was sick. He had been so awfully hungover that day that he'd completely forgotten about this terrible news and now it stunned him now as he was falling off the planet, himself.

"Is he at the hospital." He would go see him then.

"No. He's at home – he's terminal…"

"I'll go see him there."

"You okay Jack?" she said to him as he put down a five and was walking out the door.

"No." he said and then he was gone.

He came upon Joe Druge sitting by the underpass and he bought them a tall Coors that they shared together sitting on the cement.

"Here's to the Navy." He said, sarcastic, ironic. "and to my last day in it."

"Oh, no Jack!" Joe said, he was still sober and was a former sailor, and he knew as most of his friends did, what this meant for Jack. It was the end.

Lola's place was unfortunately close by, and as they walked up to it so lost he did not see Steele's bike parked right up in front.

"What in the hell are you doing here!" she accosted him right away as he walked into the bar.

"I'm a friggin customer, Lola, so serve me a damn drink."

"No way, Jack! You don't belong in here anymore!" she said.

"Says who!" he said walking real close to her to charm her, as he had for years. She had never once told him 'no' despite having had a serious boyfriend and he had had Bon, and he began to follow her around the bar. And now – now that he had no care

whatsoever in the world, he wanted it and he had her back pinned to the wall.

"I do! I found out about that rich whore of a fiancé of yours Jack!" She said pushing him off.

"So what. You've had a boyfriend a long time now."

"Jack, I…"

"And, I'm not going to marry her." He finally said it.

"And I don't care!"

"Right, so just serve me a friggin drink, then, Lo-la." He said trying to move the barstool away to sit down.

"No way!"

"Why the hell not!?"

She came up close to him now on the bar urgently. "Look Jack I don't want anymore trouble with you. Steele will be right back and I, and look we are together now, me and Steel. Look I just want you to leave…" and then she saw Steel amassing behind him.

"Well, well, well, look whose here! It's *lov-er-boy*."

Jack's eyes went broad open fists clenching, iching for a fight as he turned to face Steel. He was actually smiling in anticipation of knocking the hell out of him. And then so was Steele.

But Lola stepped between the two of them. "Jack you have to know something. I'm pregnant."

It was as if Steele had punched Jack, he found himself hyperventilating before both of them. Two of his worst had nightmares come true in the space of just two hours "Oh, my god!"

"So you see, Jack, just let us be now."

"Is it mine… or his?" he asked dazed.

"I don't know." She said, sighing.

He put both his hands on his temples searching his mind hard – he'd been very careful with her in that, but sometimes when he drank he couldn't remember things and it was possible that…and then he was remembering a time when…

He was faint and Steele was laughing at him "I'd like to knock your socks off for messing with my girl!"

"It's mine then?" he said breathing hard.

"Jack you're never going to know."

"What!"

"That's right. We've together decided that Steele here is going to be the baby's father now no matter whose it is. So just let us be, Jack."

"If it's mine there's no way in hell you're going to keep me from it!"

She put an arm across Steele's chest, like a matador, so she could hold his charge back and she said:

"Jack, you are not responsible enough to be a father." He stood there at the horrifying truth struck him so. The afterburners of troubles were full upon him.

"Oh my God." He said now gasping as he looked down at her belly, which was rounded in pregnancy over four months or so along. And she had not told him a thing! Was this new little life a part of him? And Lola touched her belly – they hated him too much for the baby to be Steel's! And the numbness of having no care in the world was gone and his feelings gripped him full and hard and the stomach – and BAM! Steel hit him with a right hook full in the face.

He flew backwards and the tables stopped him from falling and rolling on the floor and Steel kicked him many times in the thigh as Lola screemed and screemed.

"Stop it Steele!!" Screemed Druge coming in from just outside and stepping between them. "He's just been booted from the Navy today, so leave him alone!"

Jack held his cheek like he was badly hurt - as he was - but after he shook his head he began planning counterattack as he turned around on the chairs.

"See, Jack your not responsible enough to be a Daddy! You can't even hold a job!" She screamed.

And with that Jack and dove around Joe for Steele's legs and knocked him flat down, the big man landed with a slam to the wood floor and climbing ontop of him to punch him in the face as Steele wildly twisted around to knee him.

"Stop it!" she screamed "Or I'm calling the Police! Stop!!! Stop!!!" But they rolled and rolled the blood for battle boiling, their adrenaline wildly flowing, they passed a point of aggravation turning to brutal assault – there was no stopping them now! She screamed and screamed and Joe yelled and pulled at their legs. They were locked together in each other's limbs as almost lovers would – lovers of hatred and revenge - as Jack pounded Steele's checks and Steel had an arm bar almost all around Jack's neck and was in position to strangle him, but Jack wildly twisted around and was kneeing him in the stomach, giving Steele room to throw left and rights at his face from the floor. Blood splattered from both blotched the wooden floor all around as Lola screamed and screamed while many people from the streets rushed in and were trying to pull the two apart. Finally a siren was in the distance and Jack rolled off Steel and they both jumped up facing each other furiously, bruised and puffing heavily and the blood flowing down their faces to the floor.

And crying she pulled Steele away and Jack turned to flee out the bar, being dragged by Joe Druge.

"Thank you Jack!" he spat savagely, holding his fractured left arm. "I damned well enjoyed that! Next time I see you I'm gonna kill your slinking ass!!"

They ran ten blocks down 'C' Street away from the sirens until a liquor store now blocked their flight further. It would, of course, just happen to be there all lit up like a church is for mass awaiting its faithful parishioners and imbibers, faithful petitants like Jack McCracken and Joe Druge. And there was no stopping him now, wordlessly he went in, while Joe waited outside and bought a quart of Captain Morgan and Joe Druge followed him deep into the alleys and underpasses to a hovel where they sat down on a flattened cardboard box and passed the bottle between them.

At first he felt the buzz saying: "I don't need the Navy, Joe, and I don't need a girl." And he drank more, the pain of the fight receeding in giddy undone thoughts for he'd drink away it all – it all! A baby? He drank a big gulp. But he thought sadly of the orphans who really would still need him and he took another long pull to try most wretchedly to undue all the memories of them, for he would never be able to help them ever again!! But, Oh God, he could still cry for them!! And so he drank even more. Oblitoration.

Why Oh why did he not think of Chaplain then? Why did he not think of his fiancé he knew who loved him? Why! And, indeed, what about the humbled Captain Father who sought to save him?

All he could think of all his buddies still out there on the open ocean, it was them that he missed so terribly then, it was the ship he missed that had spurned him and he was forever undone and there was no consolation anymore.

And he drank more deep the pressure of the drink upon his veins pulsed and now he was deeply drunk. Now could he laughed about his bruised cheek, now he laughed about his lost career, now he was numb again without a care in the world – without a home in the world – without a girl in the world – without a family in the world and in requiem he passed his final grief onto his body which failed him

and into ditch he rolled.

Reverie and Storm

Grabbing all the fishing gear down to the quay she went. The afternoon was cold, but she'd bundled up in Tim's old woolen pea coat he had been issued when he was just a third class petty officer, centuries ago, and it was way too small for him now and somehow after she'd gone to the recruiter it had become hers. It had large black buttons with anchors on them that she twiddled and twisted. It smelled faintly of tobacco, and that was somehow comforting, because it was of Tim. Drinking some hot cider she slunk over the rails, she disappeared into adventurous tales of many daydream worlds.

How long she was in that reverie, the gulls crying and tramps jabbering to themselves on the quay, her head upon the cold steel railing almost asleep, when Penny's radiation-red TransAm intruded violently on her, peace pulling up 'alongside of her. "Oh, gosh, what now... " just like the calm before the storm was her portent reverie on the quay.

"Seen Jack, Molly?"

"No... " she said cross for jostling her reverie. This cheerleading world of Penny's intruded on Molly's world of seafaring in a most awful way and she might get really ugly with her for once…

"Rick said you would know where Jack hangs out when he's... drin... " The cheerleader stuttered. Did she know then what a mess Jack could be? Molly doubted it, but she noted how desperate was Penny to still have him anyway. "When he's drinking." Penny choked out finally.

An alarmbell rang somewhere in the back of Molly's head: something was terribly wrong, she thought, suddenly, for why would he be hiding and drinking again? He hadn't done that since the Navy -- and her heart started with a heave of terror "What's happened Penny?" she stood up to lean over Penny's window

"Jack got in trouble at work and we haven't seen him since.."

The world tilted slightly, and Molly was spinning in it, grabbing the car's frame she steadied herself. Penny saw that the kid almost fainted right in front of her!

"When did he disappear?" she asked breathlessly.

"Since yesterday."

"What! And you're just now looking!"

"I have been looking Molly! For two days now!"

She surprised Penny by throwing down her hot cider in terror and jumping into Penny's car, barking: "Take us to the Waterline Café!"

"I've already been there!"

"Go to the Gaslamp District then!"

"I've been all over there!"

“Go to Joe Favalora’s.”

“Where’s that?”

“Near Park and Market! Hurry!”

And Penny tore off, her hands were now shaking as she realized that the kid was truly terrified. She drove to the intersection and the kid sprang out of the car and ran into the back of the bar.

“Joe! Seen Jack!”

“No, Moe-lly.” He called back. He stopped unloading cases of beer and stood up.

“Let me use your phone, Joe.”

“Go ahead. What’s wrong, Moe-lly?”

She called the petty officer on duty on Tim’s sub but he was in a briefing, so she the duty officer to tell him a simple, urgent message “Jack’s MIA two days now. Come home, ASAP.” then she called Rick’s ship’s quarterdeck and left an urgent message for him. She ran down a few streets - Penny abandoned the TransAm and ran hard to keep up with her. She looked in Joes where he used to sub as a grill cook and all the fishermen said they hadn’t seen him in months. She ran over to Keiloni’s and she told me he had been there ”since last time he was there.” And Penny gasped.

From Keilonis Molly called the quarterdeck on the *Champaign* and not only hadn’t seen him, but he was again UA for duty. He was at the end of everything!

Finally she told Penny to drive nearby Lola’s, closer to home. “Go slow-ly by the alleys, Penny.”

“The alley’s!”

“Yes the alleys! Slowly!”

From Island street alley she saw the glimmer of a bottle in the last rays of sunlight near her neighborhood.

“There he is!”

Then she saw a hand another bottle and then Jack’s hand, then she jumped out and ran up to him. His cheek was in a pool of his own varmint. He was filthy drunk and decrepit, in tattered jeans and dungaree shirt. It was very cold and he was wet and shivering and unable to move out of there. Joe Druge was there too passed out as well in the alley. It was his home and he was quite comfortable and sleepily he mumbled. “What’s going on Mol?”

"Jack!" she shook him. "Oh! Jack!" He looked half dead.

"Penny! Call an ambulance! He shivered and shook and was unconscious. She put Tim's woolen pea coat around him.

Penny leaned up to him "Jack, Oh Jack!" She said crying. "I'm going home to call an ambulance!"

Molly ran the few blocks home and grabbed the phone not even greeting her mother and dialed. “What’s going on Molly!”

“Jack’s very ill!”

“Oh no!”

Then she dialed Tim again on the boat, but he had split for home already.

“Molly!” her mother cried.

She grabbed her stepfather’s rolodex for Chief Belt’s number and tried him at home but got him on the quartedeck of the *Champaign.*

“Chief Belt come quick! Oh, God! I don’t know if he’s going to make it!”

“Is this Molly?”

“Yes!”

“Your Daddy’s right here Molly, we’re on our way there. Where is he?””

“He’s in an alley behind Harbor Drive and ‘C’ street. I just called an ambulance.”

“Okay, we’re coming, Molly!”

Then she grabbed a thick woolen Navy blanket they had, and yanked a kettle of hot water Mama had right on the stove boiling, pouring it into a thermos. All this folded into the blanket and then tucked underarm.

And Flo followed Molly down the lane. Jack shook convulsively and together the three girls struggled to move him out of the mud an upright position in the cement tube. They rapped the blanket round him. Molly held the thermos up to his mouth, which he barely could drink at first, but then the great drunken thirst came upon him and he drank it all, and threw up some all over his chin. She poured hot water into the cup carefully and made him drink the hot water again.

"Molly... " he said mournful and frightened siren cried out in the distance like an lost foghorn, approaching them urgently, with bright flashing lights.

Following the sound of the siren Chief Belt and her daddy squealed up to the curb in the Porsche.

Flo ran to Tim crying and pointing. "Oh God Tim! Look what he’s done to himself!”

Grabbing his own head in his hands, Tim ran over to the stretcher “Oh God! What have I done! Oh No!” he cried. “Oh Jack why you didn’t come to me, Jack?? Why you didn’t come to me!” He grabbed Jack’s limp arm: “You could have still come to me!!”

But Jack could hear nothing, and he lay there as if dead.

"After all these frigging years! He's still doing this malarkey!" Flo cursed standing besides him. "Damn him!"

Tim wept behind them leaning over on the Porsche's roof and Molly went to him and they held each other as they cried.

"I tried to get him to stop too." Chief Belt said shaking his head resigned to Jack's fate, for he well knew the drunken path.

"His mother… she drowned drunk." She twisted the tissue.

"Didn't know that, Flo. It makes kind of sense now."

"Drank herself silly all the time, she did." She wiped her eyes.

"It's a hard thing to outlive that fate, but he can."

"More than twenty years of this! When's he going to stop!"

"He'll stop one way… or another."

And the paramedics loaded Jack in the ambulance with Penny and Tim. If he could have seen, if he could have even opened his drunken eyes he would have looked up and upon his family around him now, with his Chief, together, mourning him as if he were dead, for this was Jack's deneument of drink and death of the Navyland.

Penny was crying next to the white hanging separator and Flo put my arm around her shoulders and in her utmost serious voice said:

"Penny, Jack is an alcoholic."

"No!" she had cried.

"Penny, Not too many people know that." Flo had said, nor would they believe it even if they saw all this before them."Oh God!"

"Look at him Penny." Flo said pointing at him before them.

She looked and shook her head. But Molly felt what she did, she somehow could scarcely believe it either.

"Has this has happened before?" she cried.

Flo had said, 'Gosh many a time before.'

"Oh No... NO!"

"But I've never seen it this bad, Doll…"

"What is going on with him?" she cried, and then she looked at Molly accusingly.

Chief Belt stood over Jack, He leaned over and looked him right in his delirious eyes and said: "Jack, you're sick and you need to get help to lick this thing. You're affecting way too many lives."

Nurses hooked up IVs to him and as he began to shake and heave. They brought out belts and strapped him down, and piled blankets upon him. Finally the doctor came back and shot him up with Valium which knocked him clear out of his misery. He fell

back into a stupor and the shaking stopped. Then he looked at his vital signs on the chart. "Does he do this a lot?"

"Yes." Molly answered for everyone. And they were all shocked.

He palpated his neck and his liver and lifted up the lids of Jack's upturned drugged eyes, shaking his head all the time. "Look, if you at all care for him, get him into a program! This is a progressive disease. It only gets worse."

Tim was outside pacing and pacing and smoking and smoking his lungs away.

Into Jack's unfathomable waters she sailed looking over to the Chief standing there stoic over looking the shipwrecked Jack lying unconscious before them all - the Navy would boot him now for sure.

And then what? Oh God how she was so scared! "Oh, God in heaven help him!" She prayed out loud before them all, her face streaming with tears. "Oh God! Help him, keep him, oh lord and turn him to you, my Father!"

And Tim strode in and arm over her shoulder, pulled her out into the hallways telling his wife "Take her home, Flo, she doesn't need to be seeing all this!"

"Daddy, No!" she cried to him, bowing downward in grief. "No! Daddy! No!"

He knelt over to her, holding her hands together, promising. "Molly, we're not going to leave his side for one second."

And Tim, Henry, Flo and Penny would stay constantly by his side the next five days continually rotating turns.

At home, with her mother and Bonnie sitting on the couch holding each other crying, she boldly got up and hauled out Jack's seabag from the garage and dumped it on the floor in front of them both and found his old note book and she began the calling that night.

She dialed the Orphanage in Olongapo, she would be asking them to pray urgently, knowing the Lord would always hear the esteemed prayers of widows and orphans. But, how they cried! She instantly regretted it. And she spoke to Jezzy, who seem to know this side of her Jack as well somehow, for she answered calmly and knowingly. She would be jumping on a plane immediately. She gave her Chaplain Adams, now stationed at NAS Pensacola, his phone number. She would call him and all his friends and rally them. There were so many, many others she would try to find: LCDR Paul Reilly, 'Sydney Syd' and Senior Chief Longstreet, AGC Landers to name a few of the many buddies he'd had all around the Pacific Rim – that he had not lost them as well. It was now

a time for a gathering of friends, to save, if they could, their fallen sailor Jack.

The next night Tim came back home briefly for a shower and a change of clothes briefly, he strode swiftly through the door and both his wife, Bonnie and his girl were sitting there in the kitchen, holding hands and obviously praying.

"That's a very good idea." He said heading straight over to the bathroom. "His father's with him, right now. I'm going right back over there."

"What, darling, what?" his wife jumped up and grabbed his hand, imploring him to stop. "What's going on?"

"Don't know if he's going to make it."

Molly gasped, he came back to her, his mouth was trembling his eyes were watering. He grabbed her little hands. "They had to revive him today."

"Oh, no!"

"He must have been drinking more than ever – every day, even."

"Why!"

"Molly, it's time to pray and pray, with all your little heart. It's a time now, for Faith."

Tim allowed her to go see Jack, finally, a week later, bracing for the sight she was to see... the finished off, fallen Jack... she looked cautiously around the curtain and held onto the railing. The nurses had covered up to his mouth in blankets, and he looked frozen and his green eyes staring up to the blank white hospital curtains hooked about him. His eyes looked too light of green and delirious with a fever... his face was covered in a blonde fuzz – she had never seen him once unshaven. Looking down, and she saw that he was still strapped down tight, and seeing him so, she breathed in a breath of shock.. He was, indeed, cursed.

"Well, someone's come to get him to talk." said a another visitor in the room hearing her breath. She looked over and saw it was Druge.

"Hi, Druge. "

"Hi ya, Missy. Doing good but, can't get Jack to talk to me, though.

"Well, he's pretty sick." she said turning to Jack finally, to face eyes of defeat; acutely embarrassed for him.

He said lowly, his voice scratchy: "Don't like you to see me this way." His eyes wished Molly to leave and noticed he also smelt funny..like of faint sulfur.

He pointed to a glass of water and she put the straw it to his parched lips, seeing the IVs dangling. He sipped carefully.

He tried turned a little on his side and failed because of the straps. He looked at Molly defeated in this and said. "I'm strapped down, Molly."

What, indeed, could she say?

"Oh, god my father came and saw me like this Molly."

"Oh, gosh, how did he take it?

"Hard Molly." His eyes were very frightened and a tremon began to snake its way through him and he began shaking and convulsions.

"Please stop this madness Jack!"

His eyes rolled back into his head and he disappeared into it again and she sprinted for the nurses who shot him with needles and he fell back into it again.

If it had been her, she thought, she would have cried and cried!! But Jack couldn't cry... how she ached for his muted

pain... it was forbidden to Jack now... forever... she thought of the crossing the line ceremony, the Battle 'E' ribbon - would it mean anything to him on the outside - the endless numbers of friends he had... the years of tight comradeship of heartaches, exhaustion, sub chases, sorties, storms, typhoons, tsunamis, fires, battles, wars, deaths... it was all gone now. it was all for nothing now! Oh God! It must have devastated him as much as his mother's death!! Maybe even more, for it was his entire way of life, the only way then he had ever known, the only family he had ever known, the only future he had ever reckoned to have.

His valor was lost; his blood earned ribbons shredded, his hash marks meaningless stripes, the seatrials ending in nothingness to a fiery drink he could not, upon his own, quench.

Upon home she came and waved a fist up to Captain Morgan's arrogant smirk and alas blamed the Navy no more.

Vigilance

They picked up Jezzy from LAX in Los Angeles, finally meeting her after these many years. She was a woman now and a esteemed doctor. She had married. She would stay at their house until Jack was fit. She wanted to be taken from the airport straight to the hospital, where she presided over Jack's recovery for many days. Many of the nurses thought she was Jack's daughter, and indeed, she called him Papa.

After church the next Sunday, Molly began to question her ultravigilance with Jack...and Jezzy's. this was way too much heartbreak for her this time!! If he was indeed doomed, then, why, can I not pull myself away from it?' Then she could hear *the poetry prophecisizing to her, as if it was of the Spirit, and* she looked up her eyes and saw '*the hills of Point Loma against an evening sky, where my Daddy did lie...*' a moment of intense insight hit her... it was as if Jack was the one link to her Daddy - to her Daddy's ghost. *But why!*

When she had came home from the hospital the heaviness of despair crouched over her shoulder so that she'd know she'd just go up to my secluded little room with only her stuffed dolls and try to deal with the undulating fires burning in Jack's soul. And for a second, she too, longed for a drink of this deathly kind! But Tim, caught her on the way up to her retreat.

"How's Jack?" he looked over his spectacles, over the *Union Tribune*.

How did you know I was just there?"

"Because I know you." It was a very kind answer and she got a very adult cup of hot black coffee and sat down with him, pouring him some too, in a coffee comradeship with a stepfather she barely knew.. His large hazel eyes watched her raised. She was getting a feeling that he approved of her even more so than her mother.

"He's... "

"Messed up."

"Yes.. Why Tim, Why?"

"I don't know, Mo." He just shook his head.

"I can't believe it."

"He's always been like this. I remember some incidents way back in Pascagoula when he used to live with us."

"What causes it?"

"His mother, my Aunt Virginia, God she was such a drunk. She could barely take care of him, most days."

"Really?" Why had nobody told her this before.

"She even did time in Jail – three DUIs."

"But Jack's so wonderful in many ways."

"I know he is, Mol. And so was she. I don't really get it either." He was shaking his head. "She was something else too… everyone had loved her."

"If you didn't know him better, you'd think he was the most marvelous person in the world."

"…and not such a drunk.." he'd said of his own cousin, his brother.

She could see outdoors and looked past him for a second, again, to the Point Loma hills, under which Ballast Point Sub base was located and where Tim's boat would leave them soon. What were the hills puzzling to tell me, why were they haunting me as Jack lay undone, and as Tim was very soon readying to leave?

"Tim - you met my Daddy once in the PI... didn't you?"

"Yes, very briefly."

"What was he like?"

He shifted in his chair to try to compose himself into words that were... hard to phrase. "Well, he was young back then, in the PI, when I met him. He was outgoing,... um... ... well he was kind of wild... ... " he said eyes locking onto her as if to say this will be hard to take...

"And Jack?"

"Oh, they were best friends... "

"I know, but... "

"What's troubling you."

She took a deep breath. "Was Jack at fault in the death of my father? "

He hesitated carefully. There had been so much tragedy lately, and could she bare anymore?

"Just tell it to me straight, Tim"

"Molly, there was a feud between the two and a fight, and Tomm - your father - tried to drive away drunk and I think Jack just tried to save him, that's all."

"Is that why he's been in my life ever since?"

"Yes, I think he feels at fault for it."

"Oh."

"He swore he'd look out after you to your daddy before he died." He swallowed "I just didn't want him messing with you, that's all…"

"Ah, thank you... " she said relieved, her shoulders dropping, the mystery of Point Loma's haunting finally, finally resolved, after a lifetime of looking up to those hills, *whence my help would come*... "I think I've been dueling with a ghost for quite some time now."

"I kind of guessed that." he said. "We both thought that since Jack came back... "

"Tim, I just wanted to tell you something."

"What?" he said pulling the newspapers up. He really wanted to get back to the Padres' sports section, to all the endless stats and figures that fascinated men..RBIs, MVPs…

"Well, you've been good to us... and sometimes I am not the best stepdaughter."

"No, you're doing alright." he read on.

"What I'm saying is - " she got quite choked up and he glanced up from the baseball section. She noticed that his arms holding the pages it were strong and hairy and well… just like a …a father's arms.

"What I'm saying is that... I appreciate you - just wanted to let you know that."

"Thank you, Molly."

"Thank you, Daddy." Came out of her to her own surprise and he chuckled quietly at that while still reading and she came around and hugged his shoulders and she left him at peace with his paper. He was Daddy to her ever since. In one small gesture of hers and after years of solid support from Tim, she finally had a Daddy… and the Navy was taking him away again.

Journey's End

"Admitted that we were powerless over alcohol… and turned to a power higher than ourselves…" The First Step. AA

He had been in agony for days, now the compounding effects of alcohol poisoning with the total loss of his career washed heavily upon his soul and he could seldom turn to face visitors, from his ship – his CO and XO, his chief, his shipmates, even his best of friends like Paul - LCDR Reilly and Rick Kucera and Rosy McCoo flew from Keflavik, and other emissaries of hope that began to arrive on MAC hops from all over the WestPac, Sean O'Meara, AGC Booker, John Mentor… He'd simply turn away and the heavy sedation would mercifully take him away from them all. But Jezzy woke him back up and forced him to face them and face life. She, like Molly, knew him well.

But they kept coming back, they had not forgotten him, they wouldn't let him just drift off with the tide; they had cared for him, his brethren. And his cousin was there every day with him.

Jimmy came every morning at 0900 and he began to walk around the bed when Jack turned away, he bright blue eyes dazzling Jack back into sobriety such that he winced.

"Are you going to start facing things, or just keep turning away, Jack?"

He shrugged.

"You keep turning away, you're going to end up in the gutter."

Like my mother…

He looked up at Jimmy and nodded "Okay."

"Good, that's a start."

He pulled up a chair by the rail and began reading the Twelve Steps and in his gruff upstate New York accent the points were being hammered in deep.

He dazed through them until Jimmy came to the final steps:

"Served others…"

He grunted and Jimmy stopped reading. "What, Jack?"

"I was really trying to do that one. It used to work - for years."

"Just that one and not the others?"

"I guess so." He glanced out the window. "Why did it fail?"

"This is a whole program Jack, done in order."

"Yes." He admitted looking down at the sheets. They still kept him strapped down.

"And it all starts with God."

"Yes."

"Are you going to start turning to him?"

He took a deep breath before he answered, for he didn't want to let the big man in the sky down once again.
"Jack, He is the only way to save you, not just from your sins, but from your problems, and ultimately, from yourself."
"Yes, I am my own biggest foe." He said trying to gesture.
"Turn from yourself and give your life over to Him."
"Okay." He breathed out finally.
"It's time to face some things about yourself you're not gonna like without the magic of booze to take them all away."
"Or the Sea." He mumbled.
"Right, Jack. That's right."
"And Jack," He looked at the sailor stranded before him and pronounced: "You must never drink again."
"Okay."
Jimmy paused, and leaned over looking at him intently - for he sensed the spirit had truly changed course as the wind veers after a front. "There, now was that all that hard?"
"No."
"Just gotta keep doing that Jack, every day. It does take some effort. But, look at what it effort takes to keep alcohol *in* your life!" And he snapped the straps upon Jack's chest.
"That's true." He said taking in this whole scene, this whole truth of his life stretched out before Jimmy.
"Just keep on seeking Him, Jack, and you will find a life worth living."
"Okay. I will."
It was the end of a long journey for Jack.

[picture here for to highlight that. A compass maybe?]

Fair Winds, Daddy

The day came, when Tim had packed up all his stuff, cleared out his office... she'd sat on the quay that morning while the sea lapped and slapped on the quivering planks..her gentle voices on the waters beckoning to those of the open sea…

They'd gone to farewell parties.. At the Hotel Del Coronado - nice to see in his quiet ways he was well liked, they toasted him.

Flo and Molly stood on the promenode that lead out to the Pacific, where Bonnie had been married and she was gone too – on her honeymoon. The wide Pacific laid out before them as an endless space, winds were veering in her and the barometer falling into emptiness and void. Who was going to help her now that her father was gone? Who was going to help her sound the channels on men and boys and romance? At last, who was going to help her, for she needed help, in dealing with her Jack? He had been there for her, but she had not been listening, not listening at all. And suddenly she was crying for him, for he had been her Daddy, the thing missing, the gap that Jack had tried to fill, all along there had been Tim!

"I know he's going -- but it's not forever, Molly."

"I know but I'll be grown up when he gets back."

"Oh my Daddy is going away, again!" She sang.

Flo bent over as if socked. Strong as she was she could not keep her daughter from loosing her Daddy once again.

Naval Station Point Loma

Tim was strong for his family of course, he'd have to be to go back under..she'd misunderstood that as coldness.…she saw him holding his briefcase and giving directions, he was all concentration on his job and his mission, putting his girls out of his head. Mama had turned back to sob at the wheel a little alone in the car and she had left Molly there gazing at the pier and up to the hills above the subyard. It was then that she had a faint memory..a first new recollection in a lifetime, of her real Daddy. He'd been holding her before a gangway like the one before her… before he left her… she was in her yellow safron dress…kissing her cheek with his paint brush-like mustache.. calling her his 'little princess'.. And at the last second Tim looked up and saw Molly standing there forelorn on the quay, he raised his hand slowly and he sighed and then under the conning tower hatch he went.. and they shoved off and her Daddy was gone again back to the deepened beloved sea.

Reunion

"I'm getting discharged – from the Navy." Jack said many weeks later, on the outside deck to his father - he'd now been in the hospital many weeks, he'd lost track. He wasn't even too clear about what he'd actually done to himself. Perhaps he had even faught with someone, for his cheek hurt. He vaguely remembered something about Lola… it must have been pretty bad but he couldn't remember a thing.

"Sixteen years of hard service – all gone."

They were both standing with hands on the railing and the barred grating that blocked smokers in – from jumping. "They're kicking me out, Dad."

What a biting shame for his son, though he was more vexed at himself at all this, that he could not have prevented his son, from once again from flooding himself with booze, like his mother had. He had even been in town this time!!

They stood there in silence some minutes, while they both fought battles with their feelings, unvoiced as was the code in mansworld.

'A disciplinarian', Henry had once called himself, and he'd hounded this kid from the day he was born - it seemed. The other son was a silent quiet kid who never did anything wrong it seemed, but this one, this lively, mischievious second son he'd messed up bad. He had so many terrible and vivid memories playing out before him right then of things he'd done to his kid. He'd paddled that butt from diapers hence. Even as a toddler, screamed at him, and, if only he could redo them, and undo the damage he'd done. He would give anything he could to change what he had done!

"I don't know what the world I'm going to do now." Jack said, and his eyes ached as he looked at the sea stretched out before them. And with a terrible lurch he suddenly remembered Lola - he had a child on the way now, and he was sweating instantly before his father. Oh my God! A child!

But Henry McCracken finally saw his chance:

"How about the Military Sealift Command?"

"I don't think I can get in – now…" Jack said resigned and hopeless. "…with a medical discharge." As he stood there he was trying to imagine a life of flipping burgers or selling used cars. He'd be called a deadbeat dad too. And He didn't even think he could do them. He saw his doom and accepted it with a sigh. Hope was lost. He had lost his way. Onwards he went to the

gutter and the hospital was but a brief stay before he went out into the cold with the others, the lost. For, Hope was lost.

He puffed on his cigarette and despite the most terrible suffering he'd just gone through, he thought there was nothing left to stop himself to drinking once again. 'It's only a matter of time now - I wonder how long I have left?'

But his father said:

"What if I pulled some strings to get you in."

"Can you do that?"

"Yes I can, Jack."

"How do you know you can?" He asked depressedly not wanting to get his hopes up.

His father sighed, worried his son would be mad again. "Jack, just don't be upset with me, because I already checked it out. I have some contacts and they've agreed yesterday to employ my son."

He turned to him sharply "They did!?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?!"

"Yes, Jack. I thought you might need a job."

"I sure darn do!" he said, almost falling over in relief.

"Are you sure?!"

"Yes, Jack."

"Oh my God!!" he was openly weeping now, vastly relieved and looking upwards: "Oh thank you! Oh thank you!" and then he swore to the cirrus clouds high above and he cried aloud: 'I'll never drink again!'

"I am *so* glad to hear it, Jack."

His father was explaining the situation to him, he barely heard: "It wouldn't be anything glamourous, but it'll keep you seagoing and your federal retirement… and the pay is decent…" And he continued all about the new job – his father had many contacts; he'd be an ablebodied seaman, the pay was good. And there were ways to work up into being a mate - an officer, something he probably couldn't have done in the Nav. He found he would not have to remake his life from the first floor up! But he would be gone again, *interminably, as ever, hazegray, gone and far away!*

For, He knew himself, and his secrets - he'd remembered the terrors of not being able to run a cash register, or get so fouled up typing! The terrors were upon him and what would he do!! So he knew he would take it and out to sea he'd go.

But, obviously his father had planned this carefully and cared for him and he was exceedingly touched that he would help at the exact second he was falling off the world. As his father

spoke, he considered opening up his heart to him. This time, unbelievably, things were really different!

"Dad?" Jack began hesitantly. It had been so easy to talk to his father lately. He turned to him, his voice breaking "Aren't you ashamed of me for what I've done to myself?"

Henry turned to his son, his voice was strained too. "I blame myself for a lot of the wrong in your life – for leaving you with a severe alcoholic to raise you."

The winds blew hollow sounds of reproach and dearth of misery and such a topic had never been uttered before in Jack's life. There was Virginia McCracken before them both – utterly beautiful, vivacious - and a moribund drunk.

"Your brother was much older before she began to drink so much. I guess I used to blame you. She got worse and worse after you were born. She was so desperately ill!" Henry began, on the verge of weeping. "How could I have turned my back on her! And on you!"

"You had to work, Dad."

"Jack, that's no excuse. Once upon a time I too thought that way, but I left you guys plain and simple, and now I am terribly sorry for it!"

"It's okay, Dad, you're back now and that's all that matters."

Very visibly was a newborn in his mind, and he could not think of the baby just then, but he promised he would try – one day, when he was better. God, he could tell no one of this secret shame! Standing there at the railing he knew had to get better first, and that meant only the open sea, who had healed him in the past and he had thought he could get away, but the sea and her curse had him still! He was wrong he could never escape her, it was as if she had been his most jealous lover all along! So no wonder he had never kept a girl!!

"You know Jack, I still miss your mother after all these years." Henry said still struggling with his voice. "I've never gotten over her." Indeed, he'd never remarried. When he wasn't out to sea Henry spent all his time on the golf links or with his brother's kids. Jack was the one thing he had left of hers; for, unlike his brother, he looked and talked just exactly like her; and, he drank like her – to the death. "and then I blamed you for her death." He bowed his head and for a few moments his large, overwhelming father, and ship's master wept silently at the iron railing and Jack put his arm around his shoulder – his old man. Old walls had fallen.

"Do you ever wonder where she is?" Jack whispered after a while still with his arm over him.

"You mean, heaven or hell?" I don't know Jack, but I do believe in one thing above all." He cried out.

"What's that Dad?"

"In a God of mercy that answers all prayers."

"Yes, Dad."

"Yeah, and I'm here to help you Jack." He said and he stopped and looked out to the bay.

"I've been wanting to set you right for decades, Jack and now here's my chance."

"Thank you Dad. I thought I was finished!"

"I'm so proud of you Jack with your orphanage – Virginia would be so proud too."

"You *know* about it!" he gripped the rails hard - he'd hoped in a whirlpool of anxiety that his father he hadn't heard about Tommy's death as well!

"Yes, Jack, of course I do, my brother's gone on and on about it for years."

This was Tim's father and he must have told him, for Jack had not talked to his uncle nor his father in ten years. He was stunned about that, that Tim in his quiet stoic way had bragged about Jack to his father thousands of miles away.

"Wow." Jack said amazed at the tight bond of the McCracken men with his cousin remained and at a loyalty spanning decades, for Tim had stayed days and days by his bedside in the hospital until the Navy had shipped him out.

Henry turned to his son head on: "What I have before me is a fine son, and, I love you, Jack."

"I love you too, Dad."

Jack pondered and pondered his father's words in the hospital. He'd gotten re-hooked on cigarettes in there, puffing away his lungs, staring out the deck looking over the sea. He knew he would take up his father's offer – the very second he could get away!

And too soon, he was packing his bags in the hospital much relieved, he realized that out to sea he would go again. Out of his entire life he had actually only lived in the Continental US a couple of years altogether, and he was very bitter to be leaving her once again and he choked, "But I must take it!" he said but his heart was truly sad. It meant leaving them all behind once again out to sea and gone away from his country, his family and his home. It was a condemnation to the Sea, he thought he could get away. But alas, the Sea had taken him once again!

He knew then he was finished with Penny – she'd been extraordinary with him lately. He'd be breaking her father's heart as well. Robert had even come to the hospital and offered him something in his firm. But he consoled himself that this was a fluff job, for what could Jack do but drive a boat? Boats were his whole life – even since sixteen he'd been to see on a masted ship all around Europe.

And now, alas, again he was returning back to the sea without a second of consolation more, had he.

Seascape's Lullaby

Molly sat on the deck of their house, the wind tinkled the chimes with little girl fingers and the palms overlooking the bay swayed in memorium of silent fleet watcher's wonder. Her mother was at the salon and the house was all hers for now on; now that Tim was gone. The silence made her sad, sad that she had not one time valued him until he was walking out their very door. He had been her father all along.

She would be going the next day to Denny's funeral the next day and she was hoping and praying that Jack had not clamored overboard when he heard his good friend was dead – of the drink.

Then she heard the familiar rumble of Jack's motorcycle and she walked inside and saw Jack and from the look in his eyes she knew a telling was in store.

Her emotions swirled around her – anxiety, horror mixed with a kind of terror of embarrassment of those who loved those who loved the drink. 'How should I treat him??' She had clung to Jezzy on visiting him. The hospital had restrained Jack from leaving until he was completely dried out and had attended many AA meetings. His high-flying personality was gone, he was too thin, and quiet. But the marriage plans still loomed over him!!

"Hey Mol." He was very real with her for once, for she'd never seen him like this before - so open, so vulnerable, so humbled. In some ways it was beautiful as the rainbow, but as dark as the night.

"Well I'm loosing my little buddy." he said sadly – had her forgotten he'd kissed her? Did he mean he didn't care if she left for the Navy now? He put his helmet on the table as if that could answer it all.

"Jack!" she gasped.

"Yes, Molly."

"Jack, Denny is – gone.."

"I know, Doll." He said very soberly and hugged her tight for a few moments they held each other. "I saw him in the hospital before he went…"

"His funeral is tomorrow at Saint…"

"I know, Molly. Look, I've got to talk to you now, Molly." And he took off his riding jacket and lay it upone the kitchen stool.

"Okay."

She put her hand on his arm where the mermaid danced. How she wished to cry it out for him!

He grabbed her hand and led her to the couch, he sat and pulled her gently down next to him. Her heart was boxing her ribcage.

"I just don't know if I can beat this thing on land." he was leaning forwards still holding her hand. "It's like I am cursed... like she was... "

"Like your mother." He'd never personally opened up this great wound to her before. It was portentous moment she thought.

"Yes, my mother was a… drunk."

He swallowed hard. "It's not going to be easy to hear this. "

"What, Jack?"

"It's about your father, Molly."

She braced then for a talk that she had a lifetime coming then she breathed deep and relaxed and shrugged like Bonnie would, but, indeed, his words brought back the overstanding hills of Point Loma just across the bay.

"Your father drowned because…" He swallowed hard. "…because of me."

"He was drunk when he drove into the sea... because of me."

"He tried to get me to stop him from drinking. I didn't listen to him because I… "

"Because you couldn't stop yourself." She said and saw his eyes started in this terrible truth. A sharp stroke of luck hit her – she had found what had been haunting him forever.

"He needed my friendship, Moll. I- I was dishonorable."

She could see Point Loma suddenly."You know, Jack, we both lost a parent in the sea." She gripped his hands "…and to the drink."

"Yes, Molly." He'd said, his voice breaking realizing this stark truth. This, too, is what had driven them together all these years. It was an astonishing tie to have in common.

"…"

"I don't ever remember being that sick, Molly. I was in agony for just days."

She nodded and swallowed hard, remembering that he had been strapped down. He was so fine a fellow – she looked at him – so handsome, so strong, it was still hard to believe that it had really happened!

"When oh, when are you ever going to turn to God!" she cried to him blatantly and bitterly. "What's it going to take!"

"Oh, Moll, I could feel my heart wanting to stop."

"Oh, God!"

"Molly - I am an alcoholic."

Though she had known this fact for many years, really, to hear him say it churned in her visions of bums laying in back alleys – drunken derelicts undone but to live but to drink. The term from his own lips hurt her stomach as rubbing alcohol would – antiseptic and deadly and putrid smelling. She had loved him and it had tortured her to see him suffering from this named' poisen wracking his mind, torturing his body, and murdering his career. To hear him say it himself was both stunning and horrifying as it was mercifully healing; like many things in her long years with Jack, it was hard to grasp the two opposites in just one person.

He paused awhile and she calmed down to let him finish what he had come to say.

"I've done too much… I fought..I gambled.. I had lots of girls… I was too much…" He had been loved by some of the most beautiful women around the world: Bonnie, Penny, Amanda, Michiko Suki, Rosy and Lola and many others, really – but all's he had really wanted to come home to his family, and now, only to her.

"I even started it with you…just like Tim said." she heard a song in the background of a bittersweet heartbreak of the kind only created by dishonor and yet he had been very honorable to her – her whole life, helping her, guiding her… like he had done with the orphans, couldn't he see that truth about himself??

"It's this marriage – it's troubling you so." Carefully she said, hoping to not seem on the take…

He laughed bitterly," Don't worry about it so much.."

"Why?"

"Because, I'm not going to do it."

She sat back in relief, even laughing in the release from *it !*

He longed to tell her of his baby, but he thought that would have killed her – he didn't know her then, not deeply that she could have born anything for her love was so strong – of the kind born of a life long love.

It was in fact love, this great instructor, that had driven her on this long journey to hold him so. It was love so strong that only Faith could support it with Hope… It was as the versage; it was of Faith, Hope and Love telling her, guiding her, to give up her boyish ways, to be, that what she was meant to be – a lady and for that she would be ever thankful to her Jack for he was the only one upon this earth who could have done such a thing.

"You're the only one who knows that I'm gonna pull out of it." Hear I am girl, running away again.

"Gees! Jack! Why didn't you tell me sooner!" she was almost crying again.

"Because it's dishonorable to her. I'm going to pay her back for the dress and party and everything... make amends."

"It's better than marrying someone you don't remotely even love!"

He nodded and paused and took a sharp breath, for he had more to say.

"Molly, my father found me a ship."

"Oh." It had took her breath away.

"I'm going back out to sea." *I've got a kid to take care of.*

His words had a finality about them that Molly couldn't shake – like he was leaving forever.

"I'm leaving right away."

"Oh…" She uttered stunned. The feeling that he was going to vanish had been confirmed, that he was going, going, gone, gone away into oblivion, as if she had somehow always known he would - he began his haunting of her heart.

"I don't know when I'm coming back" *if ever*.

The sea had swallowed him once again – as he had been her entire life. "I've been messed up for so long…" The ship was sliding off the ways into the bay, headed for the interminable open ocean.

"I'm nothing, Molly." He put his head down and he was utterly defeated. Oh god, he longed for the sea and its tranquility and for his comrades ever out there on the chase.

"It was a brotherhood, Molly... " He met the Navy, and his entire life was now missing in action.

Finally he'd given her his heart with his vast inner sorrow and true confession... finally ..

"Can you let me go?" he had said wiping his eyes hard. He had to go now, you see, away from this dishonor.

"Of course." *I am your seabrood of course-- always await at the quay.*

"God, I'm missing you already, Molly." He said turning to her still tortured. "I've never really had a family…"

"Jack, just don't forget to say goodbye, okay?"

It was as if proper fair wells insured future reunions once more. *Oh Jack, my love, don't-cha run away again!* She sang to herself, *but only the gulls could be heard in the echoes of the winds.*

"Just don't forget to say goodbye." She reached over to the table and put the packet of pictures of her daddy and tucked them into his shirt pocket.

He only shook his head as if he wouldn't and she couldn't believe it; NO! she wouldn't! Had he once mentioned her Navy career choice she would have believed he was coming back again and his going was tumultuous, it shook her to her very core, for

like all the others, he had been her whole life. And was it Bon that said this? Well, yes, *'Loving Jack is letting him go." And she would - and she breathed him out at last.*

"Molly, just let me hold you once before I have to leave."

And he lead her on down the hall to her little room and sat on her bed and she was frightened of him once again but he pulled her down to him amongst her stuffed animals and little girl world he only began to shake silently in her arms against her chest, she could feel the packet of pictures upon his heart.

His weeping was so bitter she was sure he was going for good. And she held his head in her arms she wondered for how many decades had he held all that sorrow back? And she held him and she cried with him, for his world that was no more.

Everyone in town knew he could never sleep without the booze or the sways of the open ocean yet he fell sharply off in her small arms in a fitful sleep of deep exhaustion.

The slight sandpaper of his stubble lay rough against her neck, and the aftershave mixed with the gasoline of his bike and the leather of his Jacket. Looking around it seemed so strange to have this fully grown, very worldly and tough man sleeping in her arms on her pastel pink and yellow sheets, amoungst her soft little dollies, and stuffed animals. And He was larger than life, a very worldly sailor, and giant, a legend, even, that had seduced their innocent little world all their lives with the lore and love of the open ocean.

As he slept for hours there the years lay before her of her many years with Jack, spanning from first meeting him at age four to now, being a new adult and holding him as a woman, her first act as such in her life. She had gone on a long journey with Jack.

Hours later, the decadent sun of the afternoon began to stream in through the shades in thick hazy beams and she watched him a long time sleep, pondering him and his strange and mysterious life laid out before her own and he awoke suddenly and she could see even the brown flecks swim deep in his green eyes. He held her tight and he was saying such things:

"Moll, I…" He was a drunk, and could you believe what drunks say? His words thundered all over her body, but she at least felt worthy of them, these words which every port girl from Olangopo to San Diego needs to hear and to know and to feel. She had known he really cared for her - for a promise keeping; even at times needed her - for alcohol's miseries; he…

"…I love you, Molly." He touched her hand softly while still kissing her neck.

"I love you too Jack."

And he sat up and took off his necklace and strung it around her neck and stood up, pulling her up to him and kissed her once more and then he was gone – she felt, forevermore.

The Allies

Mama came home that evening to find her daughter crying in her room on her bed, cuddling her stuffed animals like when she was just a little girl. "Baby! What ever is it?"

"Jack's left."

She set down besides her daughter. "Well, he'll come home again - he always does."

Molly shook her head and suddenly Flo was afraid for her and she reached over to try to hold her.

"Look, Mama." And she held up the necklace to her."

"Wow! What's that!"

"You know what it is, Mama."

"It's his necklace!

"He gave it to me."

Flo's face suddenly blanched – "Whatever has been going on here, Molly! What does this mean?"

All those baseball uniforms Molly had worn had confused Flo.

She read her mother's mind "I was hiding myself from love."

And her little girl just wept and suddenly she knew something she should have known all along "Oh, my gosh!" she saw it: "My little girl has had her first love!"

My Baby Doll…

"He was mostly always a gentleman to me Mama." She said trying to forget Jack's kisses – would she ever? Was she haunted, or indeed, was she cursed?

"Of course, doll." And Flo held her little girl tight.

"And, that's what makes it so rough…"

"Yeah, doll I know…"

"Oh God, how I loved him so."

Later that evening Bonnie came over and Molly sat with them telling of the misery and mystery of his departure, while touching the necklace and ring around her neck.

"Gave it to you, Jack did?"

"Yeah."

"He never gave me *anything* like that." Bon said, but she was smiling with pride for her Molly's victory -- over the untamable Jack. Some one had finally won.

"Does this mean he is coming back?"

"I just don't know this time, Molly." Bon said now frowning and shaking her head, for in the salon where she had just come from she had just heard a terrible rumor - about a baby! She'd have to break this to Molly slowly in a few days – oh god, it was as she had first thought, that he'd break Molly's

heart as well! She had been the only one to have foreseen this, for she had known him and suffered from him well!

"The ring was his mother's." Flo told them as they embraced, of Norfolk, and of a beautiful woman in love with the drink.

Then Flo pulled out the Captain Morgan Rum bottle glaring down at them, from high above - to this day Molly wondered if she realized the significance of that - that he'd been with them since her Daddy's days. She poured little shot glasses from which they sipped straight the Captain's rum, her first official drink ever… thinking 'for it's not everyday you loose your lifelong best friend, your favorite Uncle, godfather, starry-eyed inspirer and intemperate lover; all in one fell swoop!'

This time the Captain could forced none of his fiery charm on Molly as he so had Jack. But, looking across the table at her two good friends - well it was to have allies in not just Bonnie but in Mama! How they comforted her sorrow, for it even hurt to breath at times ..and! lo! their love was comfort enough! She looked at the Captain on the bottle before her - he was no consolation for the vanquishment of her love; for the booze had killed Jack's mother, had killed Molly's father, and had nearly killed her Jack, and she set the drink down to never touch it again!

A furious pounding shook the front door, and they looked at the door as if expected. "I'll take care of it." Molly said getting up, while their wide eyes trailed her: she had grown up--and she tucked the necklace under her baseball shirt.

She opened it - there was Penny - on her very face the very blight of tears, rage, sorrow and shame - a backbreaking combination of woes and she rushed at Molly's face with open hands!

"You bewitched my fiancé'! What did you do to him!" Grabbing Molly's shoulders she shook her while many words rushed out in a torrent: "Jack left! What did you do to him! He has gone away! Gone away! Why! He's gone away! Why! Why Molly! Why! He went away!!!! Why! Why! Why!!!"

"I know Penny."

"How could you know!!" She looked up in the agony of her rage.

"I just knew him, Penny." Penny's faced blanched in shock like a smack in her face. As for Molly it physically hurt to talk of him in the past tense so soon, for she thought: Would he ever come back this time? Would there ever be another homecoming day? *Could I endure without him, him who had been my whole life?*

Molly suddenly grabbed Penny and pulled her tight and Flo and Bonnie gathered around and held her too, for they were all

Jack’s girls in one way or another. But, it was Bonnie, whom, was by far the most comfort - for she was the one who’d gotten away - was saying kind words of truth and compassion: "Jack's too free; he’s too free…" And in their common clutch of sorrow there started to upwell this healing from the deep, for them all.

Epilogue

"There used to be hundreds of sailors, just everywhere." A cabbie once said to me.

San Diego became a quieter place compared to what she used to be, my friends, after that fall that Jack left me; for they closed the huge training bases, NTC and, RTC and chopped the fleet in thirds and the town became placid as her nightstreets and the economy just tumbled down and down.

At the heyday World War II and The Cold War ended the Navy had been two thousand ships strong and now she was two hundred and fifty, and shrinking even more! Thus, I ask are we mighty, are we strong, this island nation? What if we faced intolerable beligerance once again? Beware.

After more glorious service in the Gulf Wars, The *Constellation* awaits a sinking, a burial at sea, asleep in Bremerton, Washington in the peaceful cold waters of Puget Sound, right under the snowcapped mountains of the Olympic Peninsula. Alongsides her sleep the other great ships of that era: the ----------, *The America… Ah… the great and gray ladies of The Deep… how they haunt me…*

The mystique of the sailor, of my Jack, is all gone now nowadays, all look like soldiers in their 'digital combat fatigues' or cammies. Gone are the bell-bottom dungarees and Dixie-cup hat and boon dockers; along with the lore of the most ancient ceremonies, the 'New Navy' leaders tampered with: initiation, frocking, crossing the line, etc. How can this be? Where is the glory we once knew, the grandeur of the unbeatable finest Navy ever? *When we lost our economy, did we lose our way? 'I just work here.' I heard one sailor say.*

San Diego's streets were lonelier, quieter after the global reign of the Seventh Fleet was done. Where had they all gone, the wild ones, the fine ones? And Molly missed him, most terribly then wondering where was he, or *if* he was anymore, or if he'd ever been. Like the Lost of the Sea, years passed and they'd lost track of him; had he been but a dream?

The treachery of shame had taken him from her, Molly knew by now, but, by and by she came to stand at Point Loma's landsend, where the hills crash into the sea and the Lighthouse stands her vigilant post, she ventured one evening to look to the Pacific, to remember the lost roamers, like her Jack, like Tim, like her lost Daddy, who were they still out to sea there somewhere, in vast open Oceania, for they were guarding and carrying our loads and trades through the legendary, myth-making

seas, they were and are in the paths of the brave and utterly free, guarded by our knights in steel armor, haze gray.

Of Jack's solo journies in the seas, she would say: He would be many a year to sea, it seems *ever* to sea, the wild sea, the untamed sea, but the sober sea… and holding his necklace in her fingers like a rosary, so she prayed with a faith: 'Come back to me.'

And now Molly, patron poet of Jack had his story so writ: Loving Jack was letting him go... to regain his lost honor over the horizons, distant... His last words came to her alone "I love you, Molly." and fingering the anchor 'round her neck as she stood there in the wild red sunset, she could still smile and say, now capless tomboy, outsider, and beloved:

"*Fair winds and following seas*," my love, and may God grant you the peace you seek in the sobering sea."



Edit Log

10/15/2014 2:35 AM
7/12/2014 6:44 PM
11/27/2013 9:10 AM tiny edit
10/28/2013 9:04 AM short edit
10/1/2013 1:34 PM inserting Mystique of the Sailor
9/29/2013 2:12 PM
6/22/2013 9:51 AM
6/7/2013 12:24 PM edited pages 8-11
6/6/2013 12:37 PM after tedium and pain of a long grammar edit on Pieces of Eight Decided to edit 2-3 pages of WestPac Jack in order to get it done with less pain!! If I average 2 pages a day it will take 6 months - while I'm working on Pieces and then Longhaulers heavy rewrite or edit. That way its not a big task like Pieces is.
1/29/2013 10:13:52 AM added hooks and Vision statements
7/15/2012 5:51:08 new edi log for shortness/08:54/9:23 AM/106383

Hooks

Written in the tradition of olden seafaring literature, this is my sort of history of the Sea and of the Navy I did serve.

A sailor, herself, from a long line of seafaring people, she longed for olden seafaring tradition of the Classics: of Stevenson and Dana, and Twain and Defoe…

A student of the classics, Ms Narwhal brings back the Classical Seastory, from a time of her youth when she served in the great Navy of the 1980's. These sailors were all her shipmates and friends, their stories and her stories of sailors in an untamed sea – fighting her, and keeping our shores safe, while the whiles of the world, over the horizon, beckoned a young sailor with wonderlust of the sea.

'I found our family name on the main streets of olden seafaring towns – like Searsport, Maine."

I love the Seafaring classics, especially from the Age of Exploration, and when I was nigh a child and had grown up in the US Navy, I found that it was still out there, our guys and my shipmates and friends were telling me tales of adventure and seafaring of storms and towns like Olangapo, I had grown to see the Navy dominate fiercly every body of water, and no one could deny her her outright seapowering might. I have this refrain of the sea and of my Navy that I have loved and served all along. "O what a fleet have We."

To a potential publisher/agent/editor/reader:

I am a sailor and I write in the Classical Tradiotion of the Sea, I have a tale, so told

Won't you let me spin a tale, a tale of the Sea, of the Navy that I loved and served, for I am a sailor and I tell yarns of the seaflowing glory that I had once known as a youth and now, as I work the ways of the Yards, I put forth story ponder of the Navy we once were and the Glory in the service of the Sea.

Author Bio One

As an explorer of the classics, Ms Narwhal brings us back to the Classical Seastory Tradition, from a time when she served in the great US Navy of the 1980's. These sailors in her stories were all of her shipmates and friends, their stories of young men in an untamed sea – fighting, sailing, and keeping our shores safe, while the whiles of the world, over the horizon, enticed a young sailor with the wonderlust of the sea.

Once she lived besides a great seafaring port in Bremerhaven, Germany and then became a veteran long haul truck driver in the States, college grad, Sail Crew of the Maritime Museum of San Diego and works with the big ships in the Navy yards, where, she writes and lives with a vast vision of the Open Ocean.

Author Bio Two



On the schooner *Bill of Rights*
San Diego, California

The sea was apart of her destiny: The author did a tour in the Navy as a 'Weather Guesser' (Aerographer's Mate, Second Class); then lived years right beside the great traditional seaport Bremerhaven, Germany where the great Cutty Sark Windjammers raced just around the block on the Weser River. Returning stateside she earned a bachelors degree and worked for a while as an engineer on the Stryker Combat Vehicle. Experiencing a desire for more travel, she then long-hauled coast to coast in the US and Canada, and visited Europe again. Finally returning the her beloved San Diego she worked on most west coast Navy ships out of San Diego and crewed as a 'part-time pirate' on various tallships out of San Diego. Ship and the ocean were always a part of her life and all this time, since before she went in the Navy, she wrote with vision and focus: "to bring back the classical seafaring traditions including fixing, sailing; and, of course, 'pulling yarns' like Stevenson or Defoe, or, say, a *First Class* on a midwatch of a *DDG* underway…"

Author Bio

Sailor, Writer, Long Hauler,
...*Seeker*

Mary Narwhal

M. Narwhal has a colorful childhood to draw stories from, having grown up in historic Chino Airport in California – amongst the aircraft of the "Planes of Fame" museum, and spent years flying in her father's plane or playing for years under the wing of a B-17 Bomber next to it. Attended Naval Junior ROTC in high school where they trained with SEALS and Marines and met many a decorated warrior. After graduating, she served a hitch in 'The Nav' in weather and oceanography – as an *Aerographer's Mate* (Second Class). After getting out, lived in Germany, Alabama and Kuwait; went onto a bachelor's degree, worked as an engineer on the US Army's *Stryker* and drove eight years long haul Coast to Coast in the US and Canada. And delivers gas all over Los Angeles. She lives in San Diego "by the shipyards, where the story land of the sea is still sung everyday:"

Other Books:

Pieces of Eight - *Not for the Faint of Heart*
A Longhaulers' Rhapsody – *Tales from the Highways*
On the Waterfront – A Gurl's Tales from the Shipyards
The Monster
Songs Sung from the Maidensea – Poems and Excerpts from longer works
Fantasia in Sea Minor
Echoes of the Winds – Fantasia Christiania

Bio 3

Sailor, Story Teller, Longhauler...
Seeker

On the Author, Mary Seeker:

'A constant theme for me is the sea.' She did a tour in the Navy (AG2), lived a block from the great seafaring port Bremerhaven, Germany, for years and worked in the shipyards of San Diego 'working in and around and even under ships everyday - in a big truck.' Has been everything from an engineer to a long haul truck driver, coast to coast, but mostly "I'm a story teller, writing even as the miles rolled underneath, for I want to bring back our classical seafaring heritage echoing in our island-nation, America."

END NOTES

Vision Statements

With God, I have all the confidence to make certain sweeping statements of story vision, that are brewed from serval factors, namely that He is my God, not me, and also, I have the talent, service and have studied this story nearly all my life (since about age 14) and have momentum through this all, that this story is going to be a classic sea story, sell well and sweep the channels of the books. I do not think above what I ought, I only, with the confidence of a Christian, say, that my vision herein is masterly and wonderful and that it will enchant many others and sweep them away as a seastory should. I have created a classic and epic story, I strive for this, not for my glory, but for God's and deservedly for the US Navy's. I only enjoy the ride of writing what I have studied with all my might what is strong story, moving vision of achievement. I enjoy the sweeping of verse and story that I have created, this is my reward, to know that what I am creating is masterful and sweeping and gives glory to my US Navy. I also will endlessly promote it – but that's for later, right now I just write from this standpoint – like one overlooking a sunset to sea, and the glory of the ships journey through it.

From AOW Masters essay these words: I wanted to say something about attraction to a womanizer. There is the power they have over women, contrasted with their inability to be captured by women. They have a fascination about them, they're over the top, starlike, unconquerable, mysterious and one step further for Jack – he's legendary plus downfallen. All this creates a fascination and even addiction, he's highly desired and no one can tame him – contrasted with the subtle back story signs that all he really wants is just to be at home with Molly, Flo and Tim.

Its these themes that I feel must be said, how larger than life Jack is – it must be emotionally experienced through the story, what I am saying of Jack's mythic status. I am creating a huge experience through these themes and it all has profound meaning for me, for I lost the Navy and I never had a man, but, through my writing I have strong impact of creating a

historical idea that hasn't been said yet of the Glory of the Navy, circa 1980. It was profoundly meaningful and glorious experience to be in command of such a strong statement I have on ourselves, for ultimately I am commenting on America falling away from God all around me! And, alas, subtly I weave this in: if you'd only turn to God he would straighten this all out, so, alas, I am writing a Christian tale: "Commit your work to the Lord, your plans are well established." Amen.

NOTES on the mystique of the lone sailor

Need to capture WANDER of Jack from the beginning of story's intro. Now I have some of this in the intro. But his homecoming scene should have Wander in it of him, his magic, the magic of Connie coming back to them. It needs to be in the intro more. Like I said about Master and Commander, it's a very good movie without this required wander.

Wonder, Myth (of Jack) and Lost Glory

Wander: jack is so beloved, so giving, so charming, has so many girls and friends and booze. He dominates their household for 13 years that Molly grows up, despite Tim being there. And then there is the Social Structure that I call the Laura Deal effect in AOW studies, where we were lost when she moved to LaVerne. This is a social force to be of use in writing.

Need intro be shorter? More magic? Yes to magic.

Imagine a whole world of a Navy, we ruled all the Seas back then and imagine a lone sailor known to all these Western Seas as a tall, beloved and lost mariner, who stole all ours hearts, though he didn't really mean to. He was just so tall and just so right - a charismatic and popular leader to all his many shipmates, and a heartbreaker to many a port girl, for they yearned for him, for he was so much, too much, too wonderful, too handsome, too overpowering and, yet too lost to those seas that stole our Jack.

What is it like to have the whole fleet love you, and hate you and admire you and yearn for you? For if you were our Jack, you'd walk the ports of the Western Pacific in longtall strides, you'd fight the fight and drink the drinks because you were lost and beloved, and hated and held, and you never could come home

no more, for the whiles of the WestPac fever raged in you. Out there you had it all, he didn't mean to kidmap all our hearts, for he was just too much. If only he could just stay in, if only he could just not drink so much or want to drink so much, he could stay in the only family that he had ever known, The Nav. He'd drink a port girl down in town, then he'd be gone with the ship, like a gulp, yet they never stopped yearning for him

He had looks, oh for the books! A long tall stride, a grin that took them all in, for his shipmates loved or hated him, and the port girls yearned for him to come back, though they knew he could never be caught for the immense freedom of the sea had stolen his heart and all he wanted to do was stay in, when he had the WestPac fever: booze and broads and, don't hate him. Don't love him, though you must, for he's lost and beloved, a saint and a rascal he doesn't mean to steal our hearts, but it's easy to do when you have The WestPac Fever.

Notes on Allure

Might of started a section on allure in AOW Essays, but I want to examine it here as well. I saw an ad for "Quantico" with a 'world class' beauty on it. Total turn off, for if you want to do a thing about beauty and allure - do a James Fricken Bond movie or some glam spy thriller, the thing is that allure doesn't mix with mundane, documentary style shows on FBI's training camp. Bosh! Its going to be all of her, and why would a world class model take a much less paying job as an FBI agent, she wouldn't, she be a fricken actress/model, which in real life, she is!!! And she as beautiful as she is, she does not have allure. Not yet at least. For allure, see SADE!

Anyway, what is allure and how can I use it for a male, like my Jack?

Some words that spill out of my mouth: Mystique, mysterious, poised, debonair, glamour, gentleman, princely, untouchable, high-roller, James Bond…

Now that you've used words to define them, you use an even better, more precise way, you use drama/story, which can answer questions that mere descriptions cannot! So you design a scene solely around that word allure to bring it out. Short stories and short plays are even better treatments for allure description. But to use it in a story that you're already working on can be helpful, for instance I use it in initial sequence with John Eagleton.

Oral Digital Notes - while driving a truck!

There was a scene once of Jack, by the gangway of his ship, probably at sunset in crackerjack of old, seabag swung over his shoulder, leaving her once again, yet another one of his girls in tears, that he had loved to the point of desolation. Did he know that he did this on purpose to kidnap their hearts while he was in port, and then he could always just leave with his ship and untie the bowlines around his heart? I don't know, but one thing some unjaded, and, shoot, probably jealous shipmate observer would know that the first thing upon his heart was just to stay in, and yet keep on partying, paradoxically.

Those mostly civilian girls who didn't know that about Jack would tumble like Alice down the wishing well, head over heals, again and again. How could they know, for this was a regnav thing in this era of the great RIFting of the fleet. He still belonged to the WWII era "Old Navy." And he drank a girl down like a gulp, and many envied him and hated him, until they realized that he was as lost as lost can be. He was in desolation.

What's bewildering is that he doesn't know this about himself, nor does he try very hard to seduce all their poor little hearts. You wouldn't see him so cursed and drink so much, if he was just using them, but imagine being so utterly attractive, overpoweringly so, without even trying. Imagine having all that power and not even caring about it. He's got looks to the books and he's a legend and caretake of orphans. In the end, he is lost without the Navy, and girls don't figure in all this.

But then the Navy was too much back then, for we had fought for all the seas, thus we had bought them, it was a great sweeping vista and saga of a mighty Navy Nation and from the sentiments to the strasphere, we ruled. And we had partied in Olongapo to the tune of fifty thousand Amerasian orphans - so you tell me about the story of my Jack.

Another way of say imagine, a bit more hooking, is say:

What is it like to be so powerfully attractive and not even try to be? We even get the sense that he's not fully aware of it all the time as he struggles to stay in, from echoes of a father who had called him a drunk. But when he's with the girls, he radar locks in his targets and they are overtaken, even Bonnie, who's the first to recognize that he's not forever.

AOW Notes on the Strongest Characterization of Jack Yet

I placed this here to allude to the fact it belongs *also* in my huge process studies in AOW.
How did this come about, much pondering about allure (in Quantico) and reaction to again, unartful Hollywood story telling which drove me to seek real allure. Even thinking of it gave me this scene vignette: (of which I wrote down immediately)

'There was a girl in a cheap hotel room in the moonlight and he would not say his name other than just'Jack' nor would he take his eyes off her, like a lion does its prey, and when the wild tornado of interspinnig together finished and she was quaking, and she tried to utter of its power, he only said to her "Shush, Love, don't spoil the magic." Thus he refused to be analysed in a woman's way of his power, he refused to be quantatized, and so he refused to be gotten. And yet he had been all upon her and even through her very veins, she knew not whence he had come - almost - he was a sailor already going away on a Navy ship and then he was taking leave of her, like the tides wanes, leaving behind pure power of myth and vanishing back to the Sea.

And

"You Beast."
She managed to say, and he smiled at her, for he knew what he had.'

So this was the strongest characterization for me of Jack, although him on the railway tracks speaks of his lostness, card games, gambling, girls, brawls. Its this lost quality combined with this mysterious powerful presence of allure and then theres myth and altrusism, to me, this is an iconic characterization all three in one person. It's the tri-meaning of him that is explosive in synaptic meaning in the brain.

I got quite lost thinking of this and other scenelets defining this pseudo-experience of Jack, I was driving my car and usually I can fantasize a little without danger, but with this one I hardly knew what city I was in! I really never had that happen before! (So I stopped until I got home).

I also like that this was not explicit at all, giving over to the imagination in a much powerful way than mere words.